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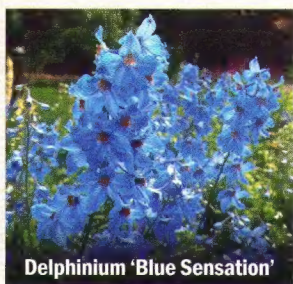
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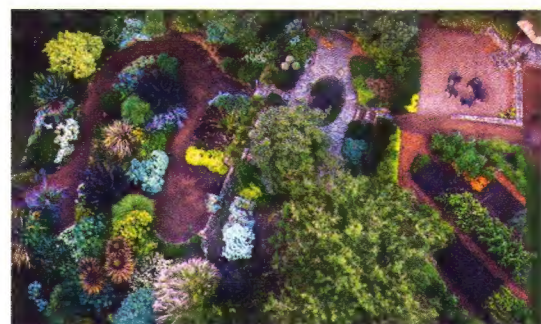
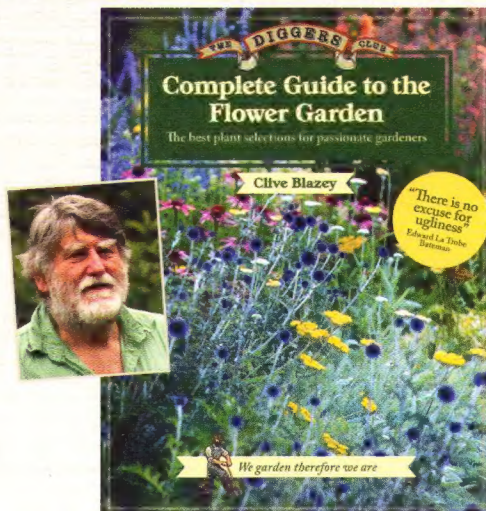


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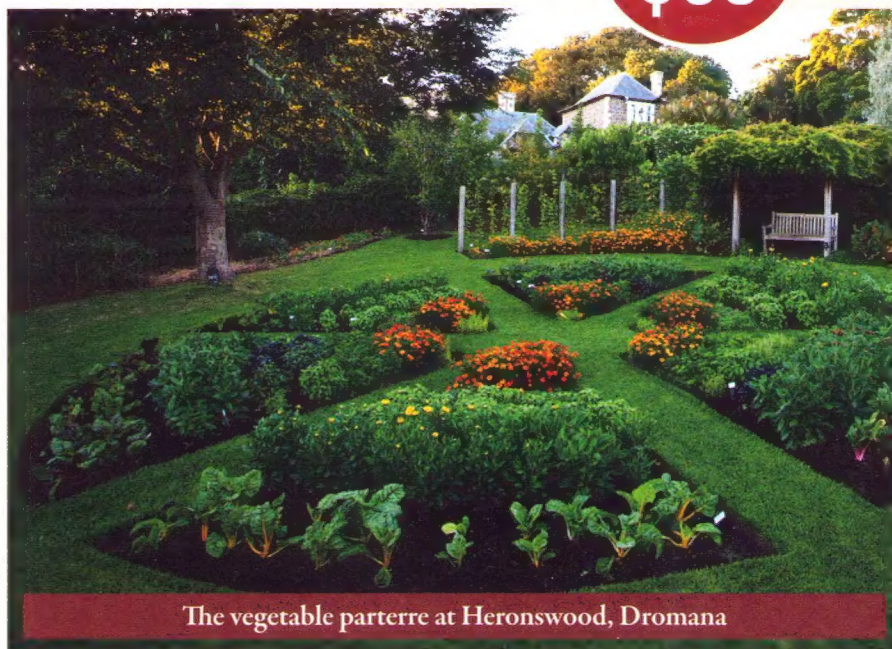
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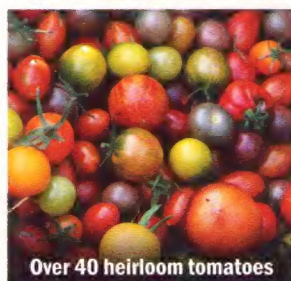
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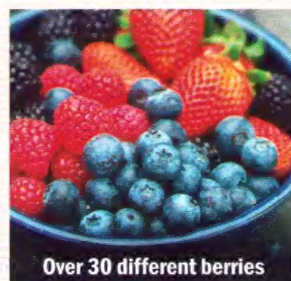
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Jill Redwood describes the nightmarish days defending her farm.



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Dr Barry trails details "where to from here" after the bushfires.



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Jessie Kapitola continues her series on child-friendly gardening and cooking.

FRONT COVER: Tanya Jenkyn is EG's much-loved, longtime herb writer, owner builder, and all-round superstar. Tanya and her partner Dan Paris — with help from their two boys, Monty and Bailer — have just started a CSA business in Esperance WA (Mystwood Harvest), delivering homegrown vegies in food boxes to local families. Read all about their great project starting on page 12. Photograph by Dan Paris.

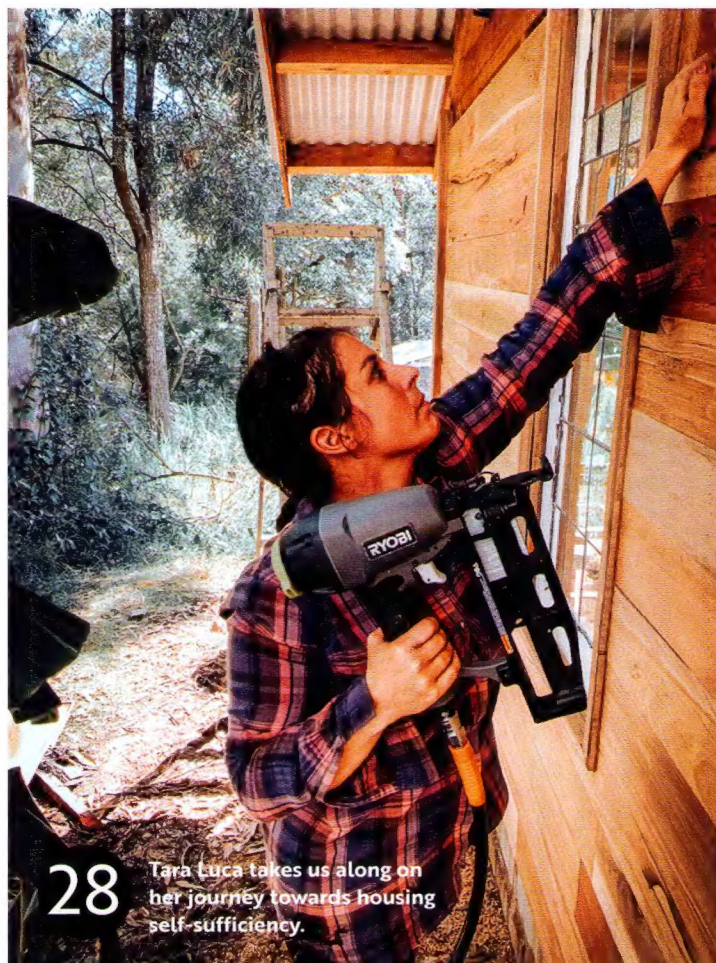
BACK COVER: Our garden chef, Gary Thomas has Korean style pancakes in mind and dishes up this Korean style Set. Table for two. See page 65. Photography by Pete Swan.

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Tara Luca takes us along on her journey towards housing self-sufficiency.



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Networking wonderwoman, Rachel Altenbacher, weaves her community magic.

Dear readers,

Welcome to the Spring issue of *Earth Garden*. To say it's been a tumultuous year so far seems such a glib understatement. Who knows how the year will finish up? We've all become accustomed to a level of certainty in our lives — food supplies we grow or buy; energy from our rooftop solar or grid; water from the mains tap or tank — and we always hope for good health.

I guess ancient people never lived with that feeling of certainty modern times have brought. And our Covid-bushfire days this year might be a glimpse of how they felt when a comet passed by, a solar eclipse sent their world dark, or when a lightning bolt destroyed the Chinese emperor's new palace in the Forbidden City in 1421.

When you have lunatics like Trump telling us what to think, we may as well be guided by the stars instead.

This issue — after our very popular 'Coronavirus

and self-sufficiency' specials in the winter issue — we return to the theme of the devastating bushfires that ripped apart so many ecosystems and communities last summer.

Covid may have shaded out national debates about how we recover and move forwards after the bushfires. But it's important that we look this topic squarely in the eye and deal with it. If only because the clock keeps ticking and we're fast approaching another bushfire season.

I bet deep down lots of us are thinking: "Last summer was so bad, surely it'll be a mild summer this year." Let's hope that's right. But nothing feels certain this year. So preparation is vital.

That's not to say we should feel grim and miserable about the times ahead. A brilliant way to feel a touch of joy is to harvest some ripe vegies or plant a seed and watch when it germinates.

Last week Judith harvested the first of this season's turmeric crop. A great big bowl of gold turmeric nuggets sat on the kitchen bench and made us all feel great. Two nights later some of it went straight into a campfire curry on a family camping trip behind the sand dunes north of Broome.

Happy reading,

Alan



Judith's turmeric-rich vegie curry stirred on the campfire by Albert, while Harry and Allya stare at the flames and pretend not to be hungry.



A small selection of Judith's freshly-dug turmeric.

Email your letters, messages and snaps to editorial@earthgarden.com.au or post to PO Box 1318 Broome, WA, 6725.



Trailer loads of freshly-composted encouragement.

HAPPY READER

Dear *Earth Garden*,

I've always loved you guys. Jackie: your journey is a tale to inform my next decades on the land. I read of your evolving solar journey and your changing attitudes and my heart bleeds. Liz: your situation helps me see things with new eyes, and you speak of my paths not taken. Gary: that homage to school lunches and your admissions of defeat and renewal in the autumn issue kept me going for so long. Rachel: I'm drawing from your successes, your community spirit and your creativity. Jill: I sleep better at night knowing passionate people like you are relentlessly advocating for all of us. Alan and Judith: your projects and efforts and outstanding raising of children have also raised my children. I love your book reviews Judith. I could not have made a life in this way without you all. If ever you needed encouragement, I'm giving it, in spades, buckets and trailer loads.

Jane, 'Long time fan', Starlight Community, SE Qld,

TOP UP RAINS IN SOME DISTRICTS

Hi EG,

We're currently receiving rain, topping up the tanks and dams. Yay. Really appreciate all that you do. When I purchase a new property I will then advise of the new address.

Kindest regards,

Denise Johnson, Windellama, NSW.



CAULI COLOUR BURST

Colourful day in the garden. In South east Queensland.

Anne Wilson.

Very beautiful all those colours! That cauliflower awww.

Rita Kreileman.

tsk Queenslanders — it's enough to make you migrate north, except I am a Victorian and coralled to my State for the foreseeable future.

Kay Dee.

Very pretty set of colours.

Mark Gould.



TOO MUCH PASSION

No more! No more! I'm all passionfruit-ed out for 2020!
Sue How Kee

What a glorious problem to have!
Ruby Roberts.

It gets like that doesn't it! My son complains about being sooooo sick of passionfruit for school. I tell him he has no idea how good he's got it.
Hayley Sacco.

I wish on this frosty morning just one homegrown passionfruit — it would be heaven.
Dawn Kamprad.

My mother in law used to make tomato and passionfruit jam.
Linda Groark.

Post them on a local swap page. I'm in Mandurah WA — I'd loved some if you are near me?
Diana Beard.

Diana: diagonally opposite end of the nation.
Sue How Kee.



CORIANDER COMMOTION

Cant beat homegrown coriander!
Check the root: almost a carrot.
Robert Packer.

I have a feeling someone mentioned the roots are edible too?
Fiona Gibberd.

Fiona: that's the best bit to use in green Thai curry paste!
Robert Packer.

It's great. I love Thai food. Green and the yellow are my faves. The flavour is so much better made fresh. I even grind the whole nutmeg, I find it's better. Robert: do you use galangal or ginger for your green paste?
Peter Gralike.

Both, but I haven't had any luck with either in the last couple of seasons.
Robert Packer.

Are you in a warm climate? Ours grow wild.
Peter Gralike.

Yes, north west of Brisbane. But it self-seeds around my huge mulched

citrus every year. And I collect seeds and oversow bed plantings to thwart the weeds with good weeds.
Robert Packer.

COLD WEATHER HAIR-WASHING BLUES

Another use for aloe vera! Rub it onto the scalp, the gel part inside the leaf, that is, and let it dry. I find it's not sticky, and it's wonderfully soothing for those long winters when your scalp gets so itchy from being inside woolly caps all the time. It gets me through till the next really sunny day when I can do the regular shampoo.
Cheers.

Wendy Bishop, Lane Cove NSW.

*Hi Wendy,
Great to hear from you - and what a clever idea.
Best wishes,
Alan*





HOMEMADE REMEDY FLOWER SOAP

Calendula and Roman chamomile soap.
Fiona Gibberd.

Beautiful combination. Very soothing and calming. Two of my favourite remedy flowers.

Lara Campbell.

Fiona that looks so beautiful, I can feel the soft effect.

Pauline Carey.

How gorgeous! Do you sell these, Fiona? It feels so calming.

Rachel Cameron.

Thank you Rachel. It's a beautiful combination. I make for home use and gifts . . . and hopefully to inspire others to learn another self-sustaining skill. I have noticed some very talented soapmakers selling on the Facebook group 'One day closer to rain (drought)' that was set up to support Aussie families impacted by drought.

Fiona Gibberd.

You are very talented.

Judy Pouliot.



I've been doing it a long time. And each batch is still a new adventure.

Fiona Gibberd.

SPIRALLING INTO HERBS

Almost finished a herb spiral . . . feeling lucky.

Gill Edwards.

Oh so cute. Are they cemented in or just sitting?

Lee Suddick.

Just sitting 'n hoping.

Gill Edwards.

I am so jealous. I tried to make one and couldn't get it to work.

Ann Davey.

Ann: I started it a few times. And

honestly it's not quite orientated correctly but hey, we'll see how it goes.

Gill Edwards.

Can you give me an idea of how many bricks you have used and the size of your spiral if you don't mind?

Unca Mick.

its about 2m across and roughly 110ish bricks. I have a lot more wine bottles (left on site by the previous owner — honest) but decided to mix it up.

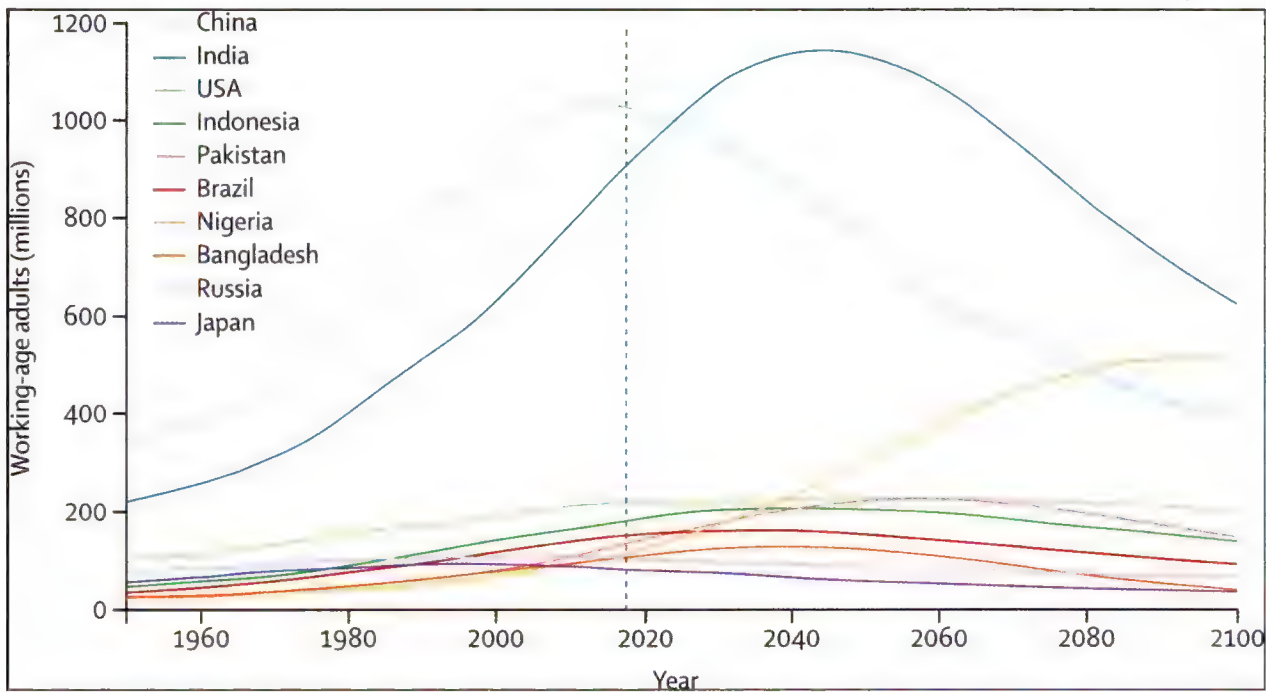
Gill Edwards.

Oh dear, have you been building a 'Covid collection'? I love it! Now I know what I can do with all my wine bottles.

Brina Anderson.

EARTH MAIL is an open forum. The views expressed in letters from readers do not necessarily reflect the opinions of *Earth Garden*. Letters are always welcome, but please keep them concise. Good quality photos are also welcome.

EG IS EVERYWHERE! You can link up with other Earth Gardeners on Facebook, Instagram, Vimeo and the Earth Gardeners community group on Facebook. Go to earthgarden.com.au for all the social media links.



The populations of large countries are about to start dropping rapidly.

WORLD FACING POPULATION BUST

J Ibbitson and D Bricker wrote in *Empty Planet*: “The great defining event of the twenty-first century — one of the great defining events in human history — will occur in three decades, give or take, when the global population starts to decline. Once that decline begins, it will never end. We do not face the challenge of a population bomb but of a population bust — a relentless, generation-after-generation culling of the human herd. Nothing like this has ever happened before.”

Now a new study published in *The Lancet* says: “Our findings suggest that continued trends in female educational attainment and access to contraception will hasten declines in fertility and slow population growth. A sustained TFR (total fertility rate) lower than the replacement level in many countries, including China and India, would have economic, social, environmental, and geopolitical consequences. Policy options to adapt to continued low fertility, while sustaining and enhancing female reproductive health, will be

crucial in the years to come.”

It's happening almost everywhere; the working adult population is already dropping in China, it's coming in India, and only sub-Saharan Africa continues to increase to the end of the century. The world population will peak after mid-century and decline significantly by 2100. This is good news, and bad news: “Our findings show that some countries with fertility lower than replacement level, such as the USA, Australia, and Canada, will probably maintain their working-age populations through net immigration. Our forecasts for a shrinking global population have positive implications for the environment, climate change, and food production, but possible negative implications for labour forces, economic growth, and social support systems in parts of the world with the greatest fertility declines.”

There are two ways that nations can deal with this; they can be like Japan and reject immigration, and see their populations decline rapidly, but build lots of robots and look for high-tech solutions; or be like Canada, which

accepts as many educated immigrants as are willing to tolerate the climate.

Ibbitson reviews *The Lancet* study in *The Globe and Mail*: “Falling fertility is something to celebrate — it results from women acquiring greater control over their lives and bodies. But the economic strain means ever-fewer young people around to drive growth and pay for the needs of old people. To keep pensions and health care systems sustainable, we need to raise the retirement age and require higher mandatory pension contributions, while expanding and improving long-term care, especially the wages of those who provide it.”

It could be a very different world, where instead of building walls to keep out migrants, as Professor Christopher Murray tells the BBC, we have competition for them. He notes: “I think it's incredibly hard to think this through and recognise how big a thing this is; it's extraordinary, we'll have to reorganise societies.”

Ibbitson sums it up as: “We've never lived in a world where the human population steadily and deliberately

drops every year. There will be challenges and opportunities we haven't even imagined yet. A decreasing population isn't a good thing or a bad thing. But it is a very big thing. We need to prepare.

—Treehugger

HANDLING EGGS SAFELY

The Victorian Health Department is urging owners of backyard chickens to observe safe handling practices, following a surge in salmonella infections. The Department has been advised of nine cases of salmonella in two months — five of them in people who had contact with chickens or ate eggs from household flocks.

Most of the cases are from households across Melbourne's western and northern suburbs, with cases also in Gippsland and western Victoria. Deputy Chief Health Officer, Angie Bone, said *salmonella enteritidis* poisoning can be avoided.

"It's really important that people wash their hands after they've touched chickens, or they've been in the coop, or they've handled their litter or feed. Kids love touching the chickens and playing with them — but they need to be supervised when they're around chickens and avoid cuddling or kissing the chickens," said Dr Bone. Dr Bone said it is important to examine the quality of any egg before consumption.

"You shouldn't use cracked,

damaged or heavily-soiled eggs," she said.

"Lightly-soiled eggs need to be wiped down with a dry cloth or tissue, do not wash them as washing eggs can sometimes put salmonella from the outside into the egg through the shells pores." *Salmonella enteritidis* is a very intrusive form of infection. Dr Bone said it enters the egg before it is laid — whereas most salmonella gets onto the egg as it is laid, from exposure to the chicken's stool.

"This is deep inside the egg, so it's really important that you cook eggs properly, particularly for this type of salmonella," she said. "I understand that people like runny eggs, but all I would say is recognise the risk." Dr Bone said vulnerable people such as infants, the elderly, and those with medical conditions which weaken their immune system should be especially cautious.

"They're the people I would say need to be very careful about the way they're cooking, storing and handling eggs," she said.

Agriculture Victoria has confirmed *salmonella enteritidis* has been detected at a commercial egg farm and it is likely chickens from this farm were sold to one of the affected backyard flocks, however this is still under investigation. This farm is under quarantine and no eggs are in the marketplace.

—ABC

PRESSURE ON STATES TO SUPPORT BUSHFIRE BUNKERS

Fire authorities are weighing up the risk of supporting personal bushfire bunkers and making them easier for people to install as a way to help those in fire-prone areas survive deadly blazes. It comes as stakeholders warn bunkers will become more prevalent as people fear longer and more intense fire seasons in future, regardless of whether authorities endorse them.

These underground shelters can help people escape a fire if it comes on too quickly, but they are only meant to be used as a last resort. Thirty-three people died in the recent summer fires across Australia. The CSIRO is investigating six cases in Victoria where people survived in accredited purpose-built bunkers.

"What seems to be emerging is a pretty strong scorecard for how effective regulated bunkers are in Victoria," Justin Leonard, project leader for bushfire adaptation at CSIRO, said.

"I assume that evidence will end up in the relevant royal commissions and inquires and may lead to further interest in its expansion or use or support in policies."

Donald Graham, from Buchan in Victoria's north-east, watched on from his accredited bunker as a fire in December destroyed his house.

"When the fire hit, it was plainly obvious there was nothing more we could do with the house to protect it, and when a serious ember attack started that's when we went to the bunker," he said. For Mr Graham, the bunker was worth the \$16,000 investment. He even installed a second one as a backup option. "If you're out here, lying on the ground and getting burned, you would pay the \$16,000," he said. "I think they will become more prevalent."

Victoria is the only State that has a formal accreditation system for certifying a bunker design. This means bunkers are pre-made and purpose-built to meet high safety standards set by state regulators, and can then be sold to the public. Accredited bunkers are made from materials that perform well



It's worth wiping dirty eggs with a dry cloth



An accredited bunker being installed recently by Bruce Hedge and Alice Aird — see page 24.

at very high temperatures to ensure they are airtight to keep out smoke, and the materials do not break down and give off toxic gasses.

In other States, such as New South Wales, bunker designs are assessed on a case-by-case basis by planning boards or local councils, which can be a confusing and time-consuming process for property owners. However, many landholders across Australia have their own homemade alternatives that are often unsafe, such as dugouts in the ground, shipping containers, or cellars designed to be more fire-resistant than fireproof.

During the Black Saturday fires in Victoria in 2009, eight people died in private fire shelters according to the

CSIRO — six of those died in cellars and two died in self-built bunkers. It was these stories that prompted Victoria to implement its accreditation system for purpose-built bunkers.

Andrew Cialini from the Victorian Building Authority — which oversees the regulation of accredited bunkers in the State — said interest in fire shelters usually spiked after disastrous fire seasons.

“It has always been a concern from the introduction of regulations around bushfire shelters that it would provide a false sense of security but it needs to be stressed it is a last resort.”

The Bushfire Building Council of Australia (BBCA) is concerned that if other States do not soon implement a

simpler process for accrediting bunkers like Victoria has done, people could start building their own structures that do not meet national safety standards.

In its submission to the bushfires Royal Commission, seen by 7:30, the BBBCA said: “All six people who used their accredited Private Bushfire Shelters during the 2019/2020 Bushfires, survived. The Victorian Government and the Australian Building Codes Board can rightly claim that their policies and performance standard saved six lives.”

The CEO of BBBCA, Kate Cotter, told 7:30 it was “too simplistic to assume that we can evacuate all people on all high-risk days”.

—ABC

Any news items of interest to Earth Gardeners may be submitted to **ON THE VINE**. Please send notice of meetings, festivals and gatherings well in advance of the events, by email to: editorial@earthgarden.com.au



Tanya says: "We had a mortgage looming, kids to feed and bills to pay".

MYSTWOOD HARVEST

Tanya Jenkyn from Esperance in WA, is EG's herb writer and recent back-to-the-lander. Here Tanya describes her family's exciting plunge into the world of market gardening and CSA food growing for local families.

WHEN we bought our block we had a vague idea that one day we would do *something* on our little bit of land. Perhaps a plant nursery, an orchard, a market garden or a wildflower farm . . . maybe all of those things. However, it was little more than an abstract concept until the world turned upside down. After a nightmare bushfire season, Covid swept the globe. Australia, still reeling from the trauma of summer, went into a voluntary lockdown followed swiftly by a legislated one. For us that meant that in a few short

days our main income dried up, the kids were home from school and suddenly Dan had more time on his hands. What to do?

We grew up in the heartland of broadacre farming – mostly wheat and sheep. This is Big Tractor Country: expansive farms that, these days, you either buy into with big money or you inherit. Breaking into farming around here didn't seem attainable until we explored the European model of small-scale regenerative farming. Although it

wasn't common in our area, it felt like a good fit for us. We had a little scrap of land that we own, the setup costs are minimal – no big machinery required, just a little labour and we've never been scared of hard work. The overriding concept of improving the earth to increase your yields appealed to our gardeners' hearts more than the profit-driven model of industrial monoculture farming did anyway.

During research about small farms, we came across CSA which stands for



Having the kids home in lockdown meant a homeschooling activity.

Community Supported Agriculture.

This is a community partnership directly connecting the growers with the eaters of locally produced food. The relationship is mutually supportive. CSA members invest in your patch, knowing how you like to grow and the practices you use. Members pay a subscription fee ahead of the growing season, agreeing to share the bounty, the benefits and the risks of the final harvest. As a grower, your CSA subscribers allow you to plan for the coming season and invest in what you need to grow your harvest.

Dan and I talked it through and, although neither one of us was convinced that we would have the uptake we needed to make it work, we had a mortgage looming, kids to feed and bills to pay. Sometimes a crisis is a catalyst you need to give you a kick up the bum to do what you should. In the past, we'd grown and sold some vegies at our local markets. I'd always been active locally in horticultural circles so folk in our community had a good idea of what and how we grow. We put out a hopeful 'expressions of interest' post to see if anyone was keen and we were amazed to get our quota of share members within 24 hours AND a waitlist . . . which is growing every day. Mystwood



Mystwood Harvest is born.

*"Sometimes
a crisis is a
catalyst you
need to give you
a kick up the
bum to do what
you should."*



Feeding locals with locally grown, spray-free produce from a place of regenerated earth.



As a grower, your CSA subscribers allow you to plan for the coming season.

Harvest was born.

The first season of our Mystwood Harvest CSA membership investment gave us the start-up capital we needed to invest in soil improvement, tools and seed stock. Having the kids home meant we could use the experience for them as a homeschooling activity.

The world was going a bit crazy but we were blessed to be placed where we were, with the skills we have and the support we needed to make it happen. Suddenly we were market gardeners – and that's okay. Initially, we thought that staying home meant we might just duck under the wave but instead it felt like we might be able to surf the wave to shore – still wobbly . . . but not drowning.

We are working our butts off. We're a building, irrigating, digging, broad forking, seeding, weeding and planting team. Dan is currently engaged in a fast-tracked self-education about timing, spacing, pest control and soil culture on a much larger scale than we've known before. He's absorbing every bit of data that he can find while accessing the tools he needs to help him keep a handle on farm management over time.

I set up the digital identity for the farm in a few short days once



Tanya and Dan committed to feeding 30 families for five weeks.



"We are working our butts off," says Tanya.

we realised we had the green flag to go ahead but it's a work in progress. I'm grateful to be equipped with a combination of horticultural qualifications and an existing design and digital management business that allows us to self-manage our online

profile so it can evolve as the business does. I'm sharing our progress on social media and loving the opportunity to learn more about our family of CSA members as I go.

Ultimately, we hope to streamline processes for maximum efficiency

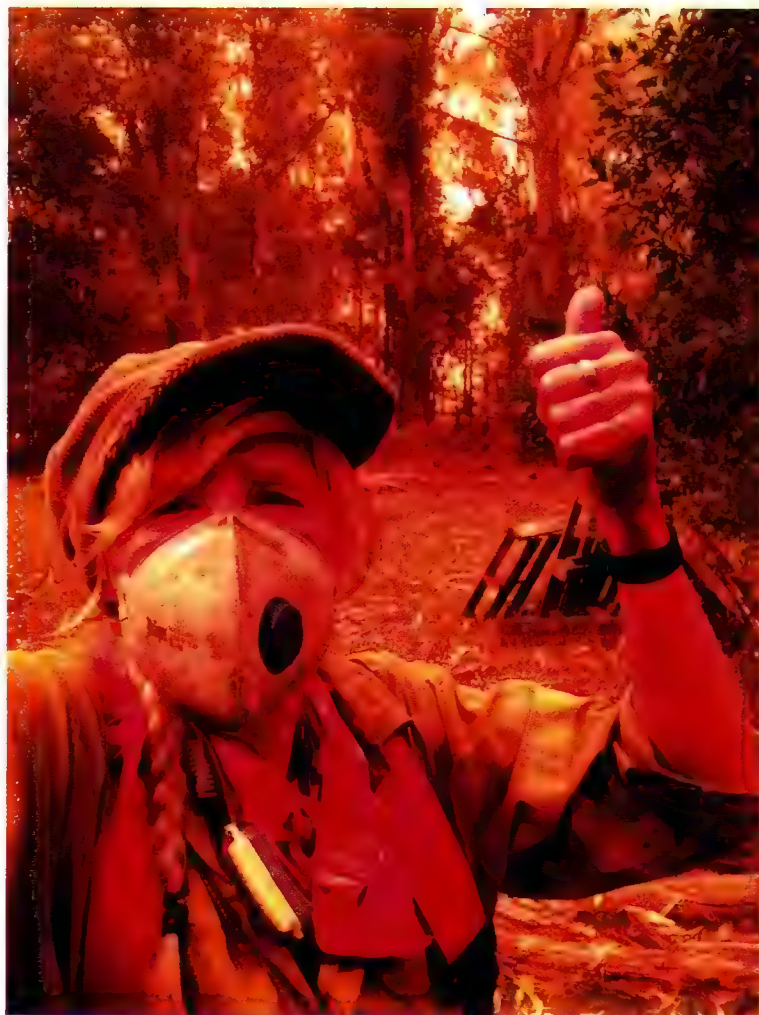
while still nurturing kinship with our members. For our first season, we committed to feeding 30 families for five weeks and I think we can. In fact, I reckon we can feed a few more and we are absolutely chuffed that we will be feeding them locally grown, spray-free produce that springs from a place of regenerated earth.

The most precious family moments happen while sharing food. In a small town like ours, your community is your family. We are so humbled by the support from our community for this project. Being able to gift them lovingly and thoughtfully grown vegetables in return feels right. The added bonus is that our feral land is being regenerated so that when the time comes, we know that we leave our bit of earth better than we found it . . . which is just good manners really.

Speaking of family, Dan's sister is a filmmaker and has been documenting the journey from genesis to wherever we end up – you can watch it on Youtube and Vimeo by checking out the 'Mystwood Harvest' playlist on the 'Riggs Australia' channel.

• You can follow Tanya's journey online on Facebook, and Instagram as @MystwoodHarvest or you can check out their website: www.mystwoodharvest.com.au.

should I stay or SHOULD I GO?



All good at 3pm ...

Jill Redwood, EG's stalwart defender of wildlife and wild forests, describes the awful day last summer when she fought raging bushfires to defend her beautiful farm in far East Gippsland's Goongerah valley.

NOW THAT last summer's fires are nine months behind, it's hard to imagine the hellishly hot, dry season that brought bushfires into so many people's lives, burnt homes, destroyed forests, killed over one billion animals and changed our social and natural landscapes – possibly forever.

I stayed and fought the fire front on 30 December last year and managed to save my home and most of the farm buildings, cottage and the holiday accommodation. I wish I'd been able to

defend the surrounding hills and forests, but they burnt to black skeletons.

East Gippsland lost hundreds of homes and livestock and about 80 per cent of the region's beautiful forests. I was expected to evacuate, but I was determined that no mega bushfire generated by the fossil-fuel industry, and driven by climate-change, was going to take what I'd spent 37 years creating. I was lucky and only lost fencing and a couple of sheds.

Staying and defending isn't for

everyone, but I calculated the risk and was up for it. A friend had bullied me to get a bunker in years ago (thanks BJ). It was a glorified wombat hole. A rusty water tank sunk into the ground and covered with dirt with another tank as the protective entrance arch. That bolt hole was plan B. I didn't use it but did store valuables down there.

I'd been preparing the property for months and it paid off. Normally this small settlement has a population of around 35 people. About ten decided to stay and



... but fire comes into Jill's valley at 7:45pm.

"When a massive sheet of unburnt gum bark sailed down from high in the sky that afternoon, I knew there was a serious fire wind heading this way."

defend. No CFA or government fire fighters were stationed in the valley. All but one person, who stayed to protect their homes, succeeded. All up ten dwellings and 20 sheds were lost.

The fires had been burning to the west since mid-November. There were weeks of red smoke soup and on 30 December it came into Goongerah.

When a massive sheet of unburnt gum bark sailed down from high in the sky that afternoon, I knew there was a serious fire wind heading this way. The fire pump down the river was on idle

and impact sprinklers chattered away. The sky slowly darkened and three hours later spot fires began and the fire roar could be heard coming.

Embers flew in and hit the adjoining forest that burnt uphill towards the approaching fire front coming over the hill. That was handy. Then there was fire to the south, then in the paddocks, and the riverside caught. The house was in the centre of it all but also surrounded by short grass, big European trees and well-raked ground around every shed.

The fire intensified for four hours and then burnt unhurriedly for another four, until there was little left to burn. At the height of the fire front, I saw the bark hut go up, my first home of eight years. This was despite the sprinklers and dripper hoses around the walls. I was defending the house I'd built next, so all I could do was farewell the bark hut from a distance.

The fire along the river had burnt through a dead tree by the pump house. The tree was threatening to fall directly on top. When the pump ran out of fuel,



The bark hut Jill built by hand and lived in for eight years.



The bark hut after the fire front passed.

I had to do a quick risk assessment. Yep – I could move quickly if I heard it start to go. I refuelled. But after a while the fire burning along the river's edge burnt the pump's inlet hose. That meant no high pressure water. I had to rely on the tank's water. But that was just dribbling. Why?

When the bark hut caught it also burnt the plumbing that was connected to it. As it was between the hill tank and the house, it meant water was draining out there before it could get here.

I grabbed a shovel, bailer twine and a hacksaw. Where the hell did I bury that T-line to the bark hut 35 years ago? Found it, dug a hole around and under the polypipe, hacksawed through it, bent it back on itself and tied it tightly with bailer twine. Gotta love bush plumbing.

I turned off a few sprinklers to save the tank water and then resorted to the wet Hessian sacks tied to poles. I'd set these around the place with containers of water. Fire was mostly low level at this stage and I rounded up creeping



Emergency bush plumbing.



The Bonang highway – the only way in and out of Goongerah valley – was cut for two weeks.

fires heading towards the sheds and the fuel dump. It was simple and effective.

All was looking manageable until I rounded the back of the big shed and saw a waist high tree stump alight. The wind had it spitting embers directly at the timber wall. The hose wouldn't reach and there were no buckets nearby. It was an old stump so I figured it could be loose. A solid two metre long gal pipe was leaning up against the shed and it worked a treat as a battering ram. When it was knocked over it stopped spitting embers. Phew. There were no longer any live edges immediately around the place. The gusty southerly change predicted hadn't hit by 2am. It could stir up the fires again. I took the last calculated risk for the night: I slept.

This summer is predicted to present less extreme fire conditions, so most of us should be able to relax but should be prepared regardless.

Would I stay to defend again?
Hell yes!



Midnight the Ancona recognises Beau's face: she always lets just him pick her up.

CHOOK

IQ

Claire Bickle of Brisbane is EG's long-time chook expert. Here she discusses the evidence that chickens are not so bird-brained after all.

CHICKENS and poultry in general are often thought of as being quite dumb. But for those of us who have been poultry owners for a while, we know that this is absolutely not the case. Scientific research presents vast amounts of evidence to back this up.

Chickens are intelligent, socially complex and are showing that they may have a degree of self-awareness and a rudimentary form of empathy for each other.

Let's take a look at why chickens are super smart.

- **Memory:** chickens can recognise different individual chickens – up to 100. And even recognise some 50 to 100 human faces. They also have a keen sense of smell.
- **Object permanence:** this is where you show someone and even a chicken a particular object and then remove it. We know that object still exists somewhere, to the point where we may even look to see where it is hidden. We're now finding that chickens do too. Keep in mind humans only start having an understanding of this when they are well and truly out of the baby stage.
- **Counting:** chickens also have a very basic grasp of basic maths. There have been many studies conducted showing that chickens can add and

subtract numbers lower than five.

- **Personality:** chickens definitely have varying personalities, some timid, some strong and bossy, some friendly and so forth. They even have a range of interests and change their behaviour depending on who is around them.
- **Empathetic:** some chickens show that they indeed have empathy towards their chicks and even others.
- **Manipulative:** chickens can be cunning too. For example, some roosters perform a song and dance when they find a morsel of food to share with the hens. Some cheeky



Winnie Wyandotte is definitely one of Claire's clever chooks.

roosters perform the characteristic dance to attract the hens even when there isn't any food! The females soon figure these trickster roosters out and ignore their future alerts. A bit like the boy that cried wolf.

- **Vocalisations:** chickens have something like 25 to 30 different vocalisations.

So next time you're down in the coop take the time to observe and listen to the varying sounds they make throughout the course of the day. Some of the various sounds you may hear will be:

Mother and chick – hens chatter to their chicks before they have even hatched, so that they recognise her calls once they've hatched.

Danger warning calls – urgent cackling, strange whining sounds.

Content murmurs – as chickens explore and carry about their daily business, they'll make contented little sounds.

Broody cranky sounds – hens that are sitting on eggs can be rather fierce.

Coop chatter – mornings and evenings as chickens awake and get up to greet you and when they are getting organised for bed there'll be a range of sounds from trills to murmuring as they settle down for the night.

Food calls – the tuk tuk tukking sounds when food is found or being consumed.

Quiet chooks – note some chickens are quieter than others,

Egg laying – the commotion of the 'about to lay', 'actually laying' and 'finished laying' can be quite a noisy part of some hens' day.

So next you hear someone say 'stupid old chook' you might want to educate them with the above information!

SPRING CLEAN THE COOP 101

Whilst spring cleaning the house is probably on your radar for the new season so should the chook house.



Cleaning out the chook house is a breeze for Claire as she has the compost bin only metres from the coop. She shovels the soiled bedding into the bin where it can compost down for around 6 to 12 weeks. Claire will also add kitchen scraps and garden refuse.

- 1 Remove all manure and soiled litter/bedding. Scrap out even the corners. Shovel the majority and sweep the last remains out. Check for parasite lurking such as mites. If found use DE powder (be sure to wear a mask). I have had success with using a hand-held steam cleaner – great for getting into the crevices. Consider shovelling this out onto a tarp or into a wheelbarrow for ease or relocation to the compost bin or heap.
- 2 Hose out or pressure clean the inside of your chicken coop including nesting boxes and roosts, door and windows if applicable. Note: do this in the morning to give the coop the day to dry out. Even if you have a moveable

chicken tractor cleaning out the nesting box area and cleaning down the roosts and the interior is a good idea.

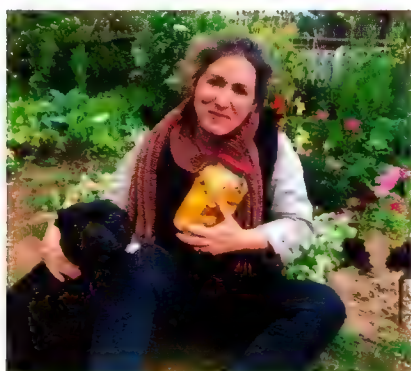
- 3 Repair any damage or rodent holes and the like that may have occurred over the winter.
- 4 You can also clean down all the surfaces, windows, roosts and nesting boxes with a natural homemade citrus orange vinegar cleaner. Not only is it organic and effective at sterilising because of the vinegar but it smells lovely too.

HOMEMADE CITRUS CLEANER

Ingredients: Large glass jar
3/4 filled with vinegar
Peel of several oranges
Cinnamon sticks x3
Lavender oil a few drops

METHOD

Place all the ingredients into the vinegar-filled jar and shake well. Leave to sit in the kitchen or laundry cupboard for 1 to 2 weeks before using. Once ready strain and pour into a spray bottle.



Homemade orange and vinegar spray from *Naturally Inspired*, by Krissy Ballinger.

- 5 Bring in new bedding (at least 15cm deep) – hemp, straw, sawdust shavings whatever your choice is. Make sure areas such as the nesting boxes are dry beforehand. Add some scented herbs to the nesting boxes and floor as well. Plants such as wormwood, lemon verbena, rosemary, lavender, eucalyptus leaves and curry bush. This will help deter external parasites. Every two weeks add a couple more centimetres of bedding.

COMPOSTING THE SOILED BEDDING MATERIAL

Be sure to allow this manure filled bedding time to decompose before adding it to the garden as a fertiliser. The reason is that the manure and bedding used directly from the coop to garden will be too 'hot' and can burn your plants roots. Allow approximately six weeks for decomposition to take place.



Making this spray can be a real family activity and teaches children how to use simple ingredients from around the home to save money and reduce our footprint on the earth

Life is Good



EG's permaculture elder, **Bruce Hedge** of Newham in Victoria, explains how his family prepared for the devastating bushfire season that now seems so distant.

HOW can I start? Simply this . . . Alan's editorial in the Autumn issue EG 191, said it all much better than I can. My heart goes out to any reader affected by the terrible events of Summer 2019–20.

January 17 2020 was a very auspicious day for us. It would have been my father's 100th birthday. It was also a day which changed our lives. We had a fire bunker delivered and installed. As Alice and I watched the unprecedented fires in NSW in early October, we realised that we had to change our lifestyle substantially if we were to remain living in our home for the

foreseeable future in the changing climate.

It was shaping up to be a terrible bushfire season here in Central Victoria, and we were under-prepared for any impending Extreme or Code Red days. Our Fire Plan from last year had us gathering the valuables into the two cars, and leaving early for a safe place on those days. That was the CFA recommendation. We never had to actually implement that plan, but the stress associated with doing so weighed us down.

We also realised that our 145 year old weatherboard home was almost impossible to defend against an ember attack, and is

probably the most vulnerable house in the whole valley. The tinder dry Cobaw Forest starts 200 metres north of us, and stretches for at least 15km to the north and east.

One evening, a sombre mood descended on us as we watched the NSW fires spreading, and as if a lightbulb went off, we both had exactly the same idea at almost the same instant. We'd get a fire bunker! We'd put all our valuables and important stuff in it at the beginning of the fire season, and at least give our children peace of mind that we'd live through a fire. Then reality hit. How

much would it cost? Could we get one for this year? Where would we put it?

In early November, we made a simple online search which revealed only one accredited bunker, made by Wildfire Safety Bunkers, Somerville, Victoria. We made contact, and were amazed to find that we could get a six person bunker installed within six weeks of ordering, and, to our very pleasant surprise, the cost was less than we expected; about \$16,000 delivered and installed. We figure that the bunker installation has added more than that to the value of the property. Not that we're leaving any time soon!

The peace of mind created by knowing we'd be safe was quite liberating, and I soon realised that if we stayed, we'd have an excellent chance of saving the house if it had a good sprinkler system installed on the roof. I started researching sprinkler systems to provide an umbrella of water across the whole house and along the sides to suppress ember attack. No one could supply and install a sprinkler system for at least a month to six weeks. I asked a plumber mate for advice, and we did a bit of research on different pumps



It's well underground!



Ready for planting.



And now the backfill.

and supply lines and sprayers to do it ourselves. Just before Christmas, I ordered a 22,500 litre tank to supply dam water to the sprinklers, and it was delivered in late January.

Fast forward to bunker delivery day. An amazingly skilful excavator operator dug a precise hole to accommodate the bunker which soon arrived on the back of a crane truck. The photos tell the story. The bunker was installed inside six hours, and all was well in the world.

Then it happened. Just *three days later*, a lightning strike in the granite country to our north ignited a fire which rapidly became a very worrying situation. Over two days and nights, we watched at least 15 fire bombers drop water and retardant on the tinder dry, blazing forest. On the third day, the weather forecast was for strengthening winds blowing the fire straight towards us from the north.

Knowing we'd be safe gave me the energy and adrenaline to rig up a rather effective temporary spray system powered by two petrol pumps and garden sprinklers which looked like it might work, and was certainly better than nothing. Fortunately, our wonderful fire fighters got the fire under control, but I remember being alert, not alarmed, rather than being worried and paranoid in a safe zone perhaps 20 km away.

What happened to the sprinkler system? Well, that's a story in itself, for next time. A very interesting story indeed. Oh yes and now, over winter, we have a rather nice, dry, ready-built root cellar for our vegetables and fruit. Life is good!



It's actually 2m x 2m x 2m inside. At the top left is one of the closable ventilators, and the peep hole is just to the right of the door. A bunker **MUST** be airtight: people have died from asphyxiation inside unsealed bunkers as the fire passes over and uses all the oxygen.



Two months on.

Hazelcombe Happenings



Hazelcombe Farm is an inspiring beacon of sustainable living located in a fertile valley about 50 km east of Mudgee in NSW. Hazelcombe is run by an indefatigable couple, **Nicki and Dan Power**. Regular readers will know that they have written for *Earth Garden* over the years. Nicki and Dan power through so many fascinating sustainable living activities in the course of an average year so we're continuing a regular series of snippets from Hazelcombe. For more details about the events at Hazelcombe, visit their website: www.hazelcombefarm.com.au.*

BLACKSMITHING has always fascinated Nicki and Dan at Hazelcombe. It seems a quintessential skill to have on a farm. Peter Birchall, a passionate part time blacksmith from Sydney, joined Hazelcombe's Sustainable Living team early on and has become a

dear friend over the ensuing years.

He is wonderful with children, passing on his skill and knowledge at every opportunity. For the little ones, he even lets them use the hammer on the red hot iron he's holding. The older boys and girls badger him to teach them

how to make knives and pokers, and even in one case, a kettle tripod.

• *Nicki and Dan also somehow find time to run Scythes Australia and they send their beautiful crock pots by mail order all over Australia.*

Slow SHELTER

Tara Luca from Olive Gap Farm in northern NSW describes her family's 'Adventures in creating space'.

MY HUSBAND, Alex, grew up building. His parents were owner builders on an off-grid bush property, and at 16 he helped build his own bedroom. He had previously shared a room with his siblings, which he had also helped build. One year later, he left home.

I suppose it was possible he would choose a totally different path, but right from the moment we met, he talked about the house he was going to build. Getting a mortgage and paying it off couldn't have been further from his mind. He wanted land and to create a home naturally and sustainably.

We first planned to build a strawbale house, on the same community where Alex's parents had built their beautiful home. Along the way, we had some unexpected setbacks with our funding and the DA, so our plans evolved. We ended up buying a little rundown cottage built from materials salvaged from an old school hall on the other side of the property. This had been moved onto the land over a few weekends back in the 1990s. It was never intended to be a full-time home, more of a shack to live in, while building the 'main house', as so many bush houses are.

Despite not building from scratch as we had intended, we have spent years slowly making the cottage into a more functional space. The culture of owner-building has still very much been with us. It started with setting up solar power, as the property is off-grid. Then came tanks and towers for gravity-fed rainwater and clearing for safety and fire regulations.



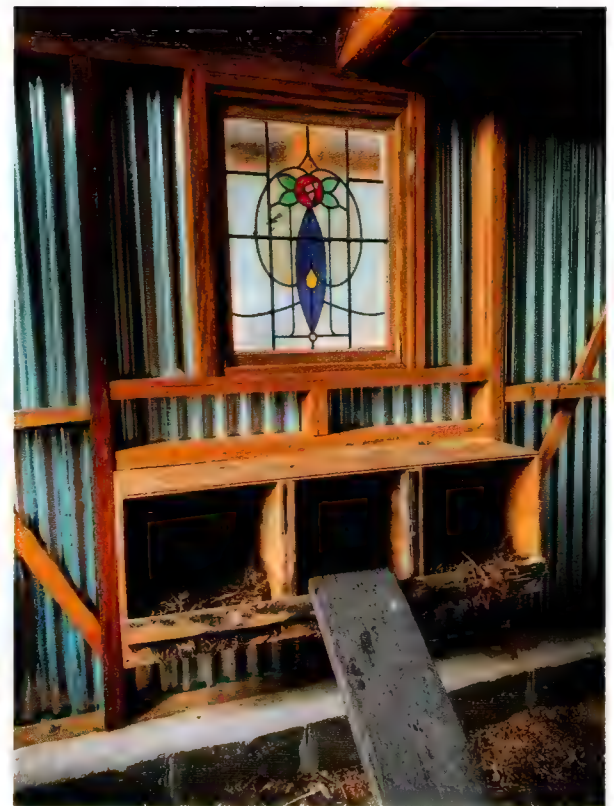
Composting toilet with cordwood wall.



Inside of the composting toilet and the cordwood wall.



Alex built the chook house with recycled bloodwood boards, tin, and a milled hardwood frame.



Laying boxes inside the chook house.

"Getting a mortgage and paying it off couldn't have been further from his mind. He wanted land and to create a home naturally and sustainably."

For years, we lived simply, working on the basics with our three little girls in tow. For a time, we had an outdoor fire bath as our only means of hot water. It became a nourishing part of our daily routine to light the fire in the late afternoon and bathe under the stars. We went to bed with the sun and woke with it in the morning. Despite the challenges, we felt incredibly connected to what we were creating, and it was deeply satisfying.

Finding place and establishing space like this is very much a lifestyle in itself. Our plan to build an extension and have it all done and dusted within 12 months, gave way to two years and then more. We put our energies into establishing gardens, an orchard and being with our young family as much as possible. It's only now, after years of chipping away and sidestepping into starting a farm and a business, that we have recently returned to the task of building. With time under one's belt, you get to know what you actually 'need' and which 'wants' are worth working towards.

Our first project was a composting toilet. Council

regulations required us to build an approved greywater system, so we started there. We used the opportunity to have a play with some natural building methods, which included a cordwood wall using cob and rounds of hardwood.

Next was the chook house. A necessity moved up the priority list by having chickens and ducks continually getting into the garden and taking a fancy to the kitchen as their laying box. As our garden was designed with our chook house right in front of the house, we thought we'd experiment with some more building methods, as practice for our extensions. We milled the timber from salvaged logs using a portable swing blade and chainsaw mill. We were also gifted some beautiful, slightly cracked, leadlight windows which made it look extra special. It turned out so well that I wanted to move into it myself, but in the end, the chooks won.

Now we have finally started the extension, the beginning of which is a workshop space that includes more bedrooms. We have watched many friends on this journey do it much faster, with more capital and ability to focus entirely on their

task. I've realised that like most things in life there are as many ways to build a home as there are people.

CONSIDERING OWNER BUILDING?

We looked into many options before choosing to settle down and like anything your options increase with your budget. If you aren't in a position to buy your own property, we suggest looking outside the square and considering land share arrangements with friends or family or intentional communities. It can seem romantic to start your own, but there are many established communities out there that have done the hard yards and are keen for new energy. Always look into council regulations and consider making formal agreements to reduce issues down the track.

Is owner building cheaper? It all depends on your objectives. If you plan your building to suit the resources you have available and use your own labour, you can certainly save a lot. Clay for mudbricks, stone, strawbales and timber, can all be economical and sustainable building materials if found onsite or nearby. Kit or pre-fab homes that are sold just to 'lock-up' can also be a cheaper option, but keep in mind there are a lot more costs than the physical building itself. DAs, roads, power, clearing, plumbing and all the finishing touches can add up. Again, if you're willing to take your time and simplify, these can still be manageable with limited capital.

Most of all, if you're on a budget, you need to be willing to invest time. Taking on all the risk and responsibility of your project is a physical and emotional task. Be open to the journey and make sure you're on the same page if working with a partner or family members. I read repeated advice to not



Alex's family home was built by his parents Meg and Jack using a mixture of stone, shingles and timber from the property.



Tara's extensions in progress: workshop, carport and bedroom retreat. Using stone and home milled timber.

combine building with the birth of a child. I failed dismally!

In this fast-paced world, it's easy to want quick fixes and see things happen fast. Being patient is definitely not something that has come naturally to

me. However, becoming comfortable with things taking time has enriched my life in so many ways. Learning to slow down can be a valuable teacher on the path to creating a happy, sustainable life.



Tara cladding the external walls for the chook house.

with Jackie French



Jackie French, EG's living treasure, has just been through the summer season of bushfire hell. Here Jackie describes how to help people suffering after this trauma.

I WAS in Canberra at a book launch the day of the first fire here, bleeding across the mountains in gale force winds. Bryan rang to say he had the phone message to evacuate. He was driving down to Robyn's, ten minutes away but defensible. An hour later she rang to say he hadn't made it. All she could see up here was red haze.

I gave the speech, because I couldn't think what else to do. Bryan rang as I finished. He'd stopped to fix a water leak. He was fine, our home was fine. He and Robyn were sitting down to dinner.

I dropped in to the chemist for a repeat prescription, still shaking. She gave it to me, then just as I was leaving

*"Don't wonder: will the person I give
this to be deserving? The rent you pay
for a happier life is 'trust'."*

told me the script had run out a week before but she guessed I'd had to evacuate, so made it right. She gave me a hug. The world steadied, and stayed steady.

A small kindness gives as much as a larger one. More, perhaps, because a small kindness leaves space for many other kindnesses, the sort we received all through the next three months of fire, evacuations, loss of deeply loved forest, friends, and friend's houses my hands had helped build.

So how do we help those who have lived through a summer of smoke and trauma, or flood or wind, and now with the fear or actuality of Covid-19? How do we help ourselves?

STEP 1. Be kind. Smile at the person who hands you the bread, or sits next to you, and meet their eyes. When you see a need, give what you can. Don't wonder: will the person I give this to be deserving? The rent you pay for a happier life is 'trust'.

I spent most of those months raising funds, as an injury meant I can't contribute much physically, and providing food and water to hundreds of animals who had escaped the fires. Gazing at those animals eat, and drink, as I watched an ember attack at 2 am, has been one of my life's profound joys.

STEP 2. Empathise and be cautious. You may not know if the person next to you is traumatised or terrified from fire, illness, loss of loved people, landscape, animals, their job, or sudden insecurity. Lives have been so quickly destroyed that they may not leave obvious traces. Be

patient; understand that so many of us have heightened emotions after tragedy, and may overreact.

STEP 3. No matter what the tragedy, the grief, the fear, hold it at arm's length, so you can still see the beauty of the world around you.

Grief shouldn't be ignored, or it will jump out at you months or years later. Grief must be lived. But we need to coax ourselves, and others, to see what is around us too.

I was told this by a wise man just weeks before I had to follow Bryan in an ambulance to Canberra. I was frightened; grieving. But I saw the sun shine through the gold grass, and the kookaburra stare at me from a branch . . . I remember every second of the beauty of that afternoon, and it's now far more vivid than the fear.

We humans have been conditioned to focus on danger. "Sabretooth tiger ahead. Concentrate!" But there are few sabretooths these days, even metaphorical ones, where we need to focus only on the risk.

STEP 5. Just give. Or help. Don't ask: "Does this person deserve it?" or "Will they spend it wisely?". But if possible I try to give to individuals or small groups or for specific projects, not large organisations, not just because less will be spent on growing complexities of organisation, but because this increases the number of social bonds created with each gift. Donations to large organisations immediately become anonymous, part of a total. (I do donate to large organisations too).

STEP 6. Don't hesitate to ask. It's only in the past two years that I have learned to ask for help, and I'm still not good at it, and tend to say 'I'm fine' even when I could badly do with a hand. Yet I love helping others. Helping makes people happy. Being allowed to do so is a gift from those who need help to those who can give.

But you can also be a giver and a recipient. I need physical help these days, and could only fight the most timid of bushfires. But even though I still work to support my family, most of the past eight months has been spent doing volunteer work, and thanks to social media and Zoom, across the world. (And okay, that has meant that I have not spent enough time on necessities like sleep, combing my hair or taming the wilderness that is supposed to be a garden. Or even watching the wombats or moonrise. Now crisis mode is ending, at least for a while, I'm trying to add those back into my life. Love your new haircut, a friend said on Zoom yesterday. I had to admit I had simply combed it.)

Much of the past fortnight has been spent with the kids of a community in virus-hit Peru. And yes, when the 50th email that day comes in from a seven year old kid, when I'm trying to meet a deadline and still working at midnight, I do mutter as I answer it and send photos of the wombats in our garden. But when I see the need, then grins, on the kids' faces, I know that every kind act tilts the world just slightly towards cooperation and survival.

STEP 7. When a person, family or

community is unhappy, create happiness. It won't fix the grief – grief should not be 'fixed' – but it will help balance it with joy.

What makes humans joyful? Friendship. Kindness. Laughter. Learning to breathe in sunlight and taste night air. Animals. Laughing at animals. Simple personal contact, even if by email. The world of trees and mountains. I remember a day, grieving, when an inarticulate friend took me up a mountain. We sat on a rock and gazed at unending trees and it was so large and wonderful that the grief assumed its correct proportions in my life.

Our local community is now filled with people – many of whom have lost

"It's not a coincidence that those who are giving most seem to be recovering from what they've been through. Kindness helps both those who give and those who receive."



Fire trucks at Araluen near Jackie's home.



This is 'The Fire Wombat' from the feed and water station we operated during the drought/fires and afterwards. During the worst of the fires wombats, wallabies, snakes, possums and other animals stood side by side, eating or drinking in a month-long truce. But when the fire wombat arrived every one of them moved aside to let her through as she staggered to the food.

most of what they owned or loved in the fires – making others happy. It's not a coincidence that those who are giving most seem to be recovering from what they've been through. Kindness helps both those who give and those who receive. Humans are, according to various studies, happy after they have been kind.

In the last few months our community has been Zooming madly, with everything from yoga, meditation, discussion groups to writing classes, prayer groups, music or even choirs. Somehow, within a week, groceries, casseroles or chemist supplies were being

delivered to those who needed them.

After the bushfires here, before lockdown began, we had a community waratah planting; free books for kids events; a community 'plant daffodils along the path and eat lunch off the grass'; community Sunday breakfasts to raise money for those who've lost most; a writing and an art competition for all the district's kids. Kids who are too deeply shocked to talk will often write or paint – and suddenly begin to speak again.

There were school dances at lunch time. A fake Academy Awards. Sausage sizzles; bring a plate suppers; morning teas; sausage sizzles without the sausages

for those of us who don't eat them . . . I don't think there's been a day in the past few months without our community being offered something else to smile about.

A million emails asking: "Are you okay?" and listening to those who aren't. Music. Silly poems. Ten million hugs, even if so many have been by Zoom.

Humans are social beings. We take our cues from those around us. Hatred is contagious. So is kindness. Find friends whose purpose or practice is to do good. And every day, think of one small new way to give joy or to be kind.

Darn that HOLEY SOCK!



Jo Roberts from northern Tasmania has written some wonderfully-witty yarns (sorry) for EG in recent times. Here she helps us revisit the ancient and neglected joy of darning.

THERE may be many worse things in life than a hole in your sock, but truthfully a sock with a hole in it makes a day more miserable than it needs to be. Your heel rubs on the back of your gumboot or your toe sticks out and you get a blister inside your work boots. There is little joy to be had on holey sock day. Then the dread day comes when there are no socks without holes. What to do? *Buy new socks!* some might say, but no, my friend, we are Earth Gardeners. We can fashion an

entire lifestyle from some old tin cans, two sticks and a piece of string. We do not buy new socks!

Ideally I would have demonstrated the ancient art of darning on a sturdy work sock, but none of my work socks currently have holes in them and I am prepared to sacrifice much for Art, but deliberately making holes in my work socks just seems perverse. Consequently, darning today comes courtesy of the kiddo's sport socks. Because all socks deserve a good darn,

even if they don't spend quality time inside a gumboot.

Let's start from the very beginning. First you will need a sock with a hole in it. You will want a needle with a large eye to fit the yarn through, and a slightly rounded end which will push through the wool instead of piercing it as a sharp needle would. For the wool you want to find something with a weight similar to the sock. You can buy dedicated mending wool from a specialist yarn shop, or peel apart the strands of a

standard ball of wool (I have gone with this option). For thin dress socks you can use strands of embroidery thread. You will also need your grandma's darning mushroom. If your grandma inexplicably failed to bequeath you her darning mushroom, try using a small rubber ball. Something with a smooth round surface underneath the hole you are darning is ideal.*

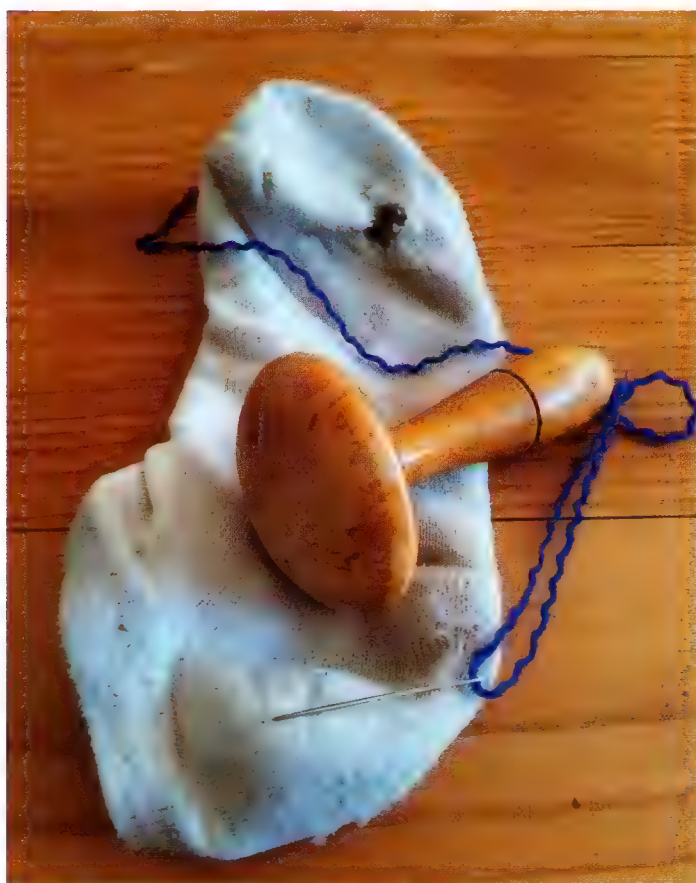
Insert the darning mushroom into the sock under the hole and clip away

all the fluffy bits so you have a nice clean edge to work with. Begin a line of running stitch a little way past the edge of the hole. These extra rows of stitching strengthen the thinner area of fabric around the hole and makes sure the edges of the hole are bound securely.

Keep going with the lines of running stitch until you bump into the hole. Then take a long stitch over the hole keeping it as firm as you can without

bunching up the fabric. Keep the lines of running stitch going in the same direction, taking one big stitch whenever you bump into the hole. Keep the lines of stitching quite close together.

Once you've covered the hole with those big stitches, do some more lines of running stitch along the other side of the hole and then tie off. I don't tie a knot on a darn because you don't want a knot under your foot. That is not comfy. A stitch with another stitch on top does



First catch your darning mushroom . . . or a rubber ball.



Begin a line of running stitch a little way past the edge of the hole.

*“There is little joy to be had on holey sock day
Then the dread day comes when there
are no socks without holes. What to do?”*



Once you've covered the hole with those big stitches, do some more lines of running stitch along the other side of the hole.



Jo changed the yarn colour for the second half to illustrate the technique.

the trick. Now you have completed the first half of your darn. Pat yourself on the back, make a nice cup of tea and read a few pages of *Earth Garden*. Try not to get too distracted by fascinating projects on all those other pages. There is still darning work to be done.

For the other half of the darn I have changed yarn colour for purposes of illustration. You can complete the whole darn in one colour, although it is slightly more difficult to see whether you are up to an under stitch or an over stitch. You can also do some invisible darning using yarn the same colour as your sock, but honestly, where is the fun in that?

Turn your sock 90 degrees and start again with the rows of running stitch.

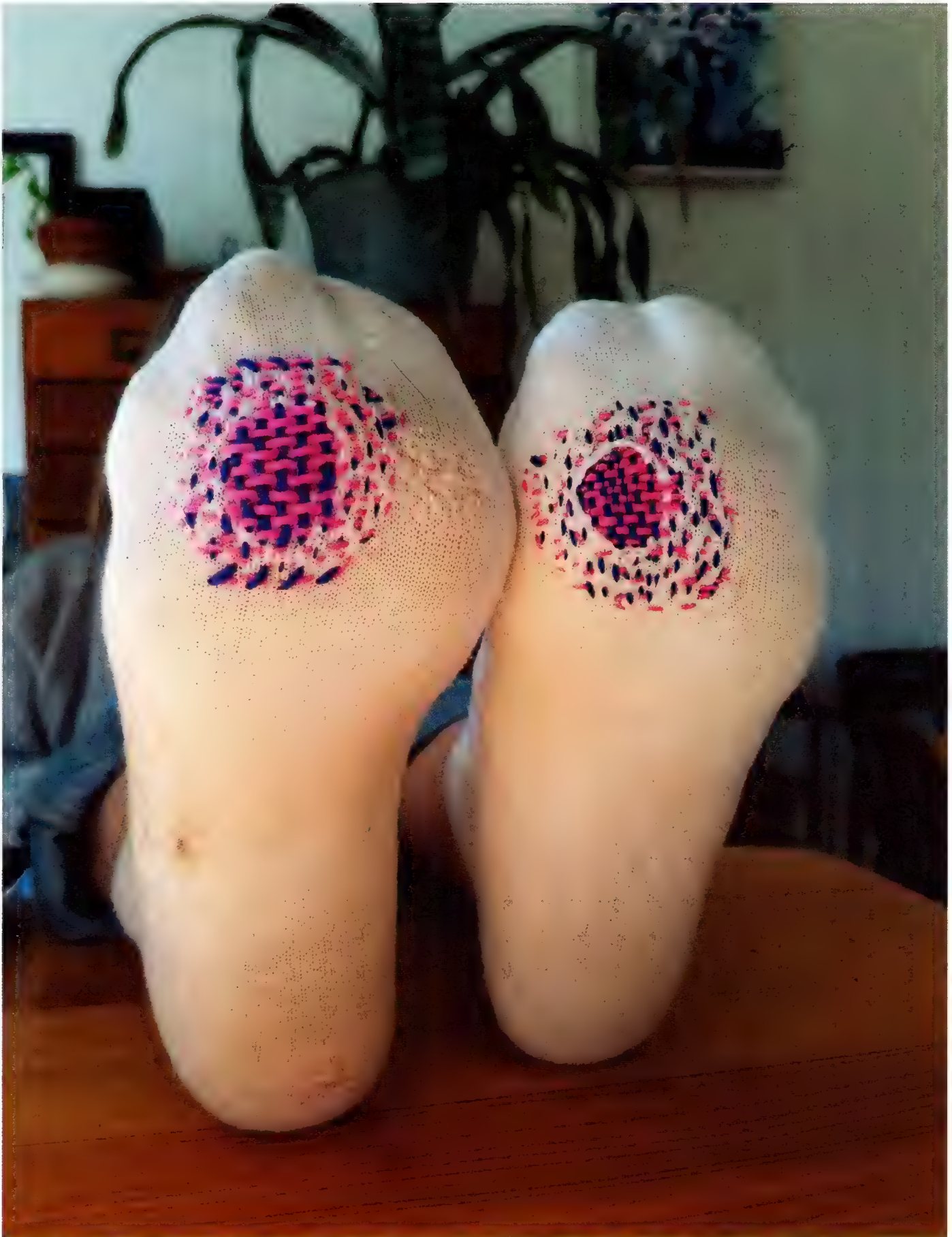
This time, when you bump into the hole, weave your needle over and under the long stitches already in place. Then on the next row weave under and over. Keep going with the weaving and the running stitches until you have covered the whole area again, and then tie off. That's it! You are done! Oh, but don't forget the other sock. Most holes come in pairs, just like their socks. You can darn on the right side or the wrong side of the sock. The edges of the darn look slightly more defined if you turn your sock inside out and darn on the inside. Try both ways and see.

You will notice that my darning is fairly wonky. My grandma taught me to darn when I was a teenager and I have been darning haphazardly

ever since. Darning can be a stunning work of art, but mine isn't. I appreciate beautiful needlework enormously but I can't reproduce it, so I am putting my wonky darning into these pages as an encouragement to those of you out there who have holey socks and have never had a go at mending them up.

It's okay – it doesn't need to be beautiful, it just needs to be mended. And however it turns out it will be more mended than if you never have a go. After all, anything worth doing is worth doing badly because then at least it gets done . . .

*You can buy a darning mushroom for \$17 including postage on ebay.com.au from jm-embroideries; search: 'Birch Darning Mushroom' in ebay.



Most holes come in pairs, just like their socks.

Rules for our NEW FIRE WORLD



Dr Barry Traill: better photo-bombed than firebombed.

Dr Barry Traill is EG's former 'Dr Wildlife' — a hugely-popular column he wrote for years. Barry's a volunteer firefighter, ecologist, and head of a major national environment group. Here is his personal take on last summer's fires, and where to from here.

THEY have to look after themselves," said the local fire boss who was briefing us. "You will focus on protecting the shop and the school."

I'd asked the boss what we should do for any residents who stayed. The locals of the village and the surrounding district had been directed to leave. The forecast was for intense winds and an ember attack from the south that night. It was blunt prioritisation on our first day on the south coast of New South Wales.

He wasn't criticising anyone who'd ignored the advice to evacuate. He was

just wearily confirming our task that night. The little town had nearly gone the previous week — saved by a last minute wind change. There was a black line in the paddocks and the burnt rubble of a house just out of town.

We were a strike team of volunteers from the Sunshine Coast. Most of us had been on fires on and off since September. Some of those fires had been little, some big. But the Sunshine Coast hadn't been malletted as hard by drought as New South Wales. From the village I could see forested ridges

looking like a ground fire had already scorched the canopy. In fact those ridges were untouched by fire: the drought had dried the eucalypt canopies to brown. We'd arrived as the fires on the south coast entered their third month.

The fires continued but, fortunately for us and the village, the forecast was wrong, and the ember attack didn't eventuate that night. The week after we left NSW, blessed unseasonal rains came all down the East Coast. After 74 days the south coast fires in New South Wales were out.

Firefighters and choppers seem to go together these days.



WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The millions of hectares of burnt native forests will, in most cases, regrow. But it will take many hundreds of years to fully replace the wildlife homes – the old trees and rainforests that were heavily burnt. The lives and houses of people need to be re-built. Long term support for the hardest hit communities will be crucial. Extreme fires are traumatic for individuals and for communities.

And we need to do everything we can to stop it all happening again next fire season, and then all the ones after that.

As an individual what can you do to minimise the damage from future wildfires? As a lover of living in country Australia here are my thoughts and tips for living in our fire-prone landscapes in a time of global warming.

- *Don't expect someone to come and save you.* I was often struck during the last summer that some folk assumed that a fire-truck would always come if their place was threatened. In smaller fires, the exceptional emergency services of Australia will likely have a fire truck at your door. But you can't assume this. In a catastrophic fire there aren't enough fire units to go around. If you live in any fire prone landscape you need to take personal responsibility.
- *Have a fire plan.* If you live in the country, or near bush in the city in south-eastern or south-western Australia, then make a detailed fire plan. You can no longer rely on past fire history in your locale as a guide to your level of risk. My partner Susie and I have been 18 months on a new place in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland. Based on the known fire history of our little valley (no major fires), the climate (high rainfall), and the vegetation of the landscape (largely rainforest), I thought we would be largely immune from serious fires when we bought it. I don't think that anymore. The climate will keep warming to some degree no matter how quickly we reduce greenhouse gas emissions from here on. You need to assume that in the future the weather conditions *will at times be more extreme* than this summer.

"I was often struck during the last summer that some folk assumed that a fire-truck would always come if their place was threatened."

The first question to answer is a basic one: will you go or will you stay and defend? Make that decision now. Don't make it on the fly during an active fire. If you plan to stay, assume you'll need at least two fit people, who will be calm, practical and who can stay on the job as needed for days. You'll also need a pump and hose system that will work when the mains power goes, and very importantly (I believe) a guaranteed fireproof refuge of some sort (a purpose built fire bunker, a large dam away from trees, a very bare paddock) that is seconds – not minutes – from the house you are defending. The latter is strangely not discussed in the good fire planning advisories put out by the fire agencies. Perhaps they are worried about their liability if a fire refuge design doesn't work. But if your plan is to stay and defend, I believe it's very important to have a safe last minute option if it all turns to flame – in spite of your best efforts.

To be blunt: don't try and be the hero bloke (it's usually men that do it) and make a last minute decision to stay and try to save the house in extreme conditions. Yep ... it might work. Or ... *you might die*. In the latter case your family won't appreciate your manly, poorly prepared, hero-ness.

- *Prepare your house and yard.* Think through the risks around your house, the sheds, the trees and the grass. Even small details can matter. Some firewood stacked against a wall, the old tyres sitting in the yard, the meltable plastic pipes feeding a rooftop sprinkler. These are just three examples I know of that caused the loss of a building last summer.
- *Join the local fire-brigade.* If you are reasonably fit and can make a commitment of time join the local volunteer fire brigade. As well as

providing a service that is increasingly vital you'll meet other exceptional, community minded people.

- *Get engaged in the land management of your local area.* Our bushland and forests now need the best possible management. In the southern temperate landscapes uncontrolled wildfires are now their biggest threat. Learn more about the natural fire ecology of your region, engage with private and public land managers on how they can be best protected from fire through new approaches such as more sympathetic ecological/ Indigenous burning patterns and establishing more quick reaction strike teams to put out fires before they get out of control. Part of the problem is that we have become divorced from personal expertise of how fire works in our landscapes. Worth a read is *Fire Country*, by Victor Steffenson, discussing the principles of Indigenous fire management.
- *Fight for action on climate change.* Do whatever you can personally to reduce greenhouse pollution. Act personally and locally: shift to renewables, no un-necessary air-travel, ask friends and family to act. Act globally: support one of the many community groups fighting for stronger, faster, better action from governments and industry on global warming. And an act of hope: plant a tree – to shade our planet, as a home for wildlife, and to soak up tonnes of greenhouse gas pollution in the decades of its lifetime.
- *Have a fire plan.* Just to say it again. Go online and look at one of the good sets of advice put out by the State fire services such as googling the phrase: 'bush fire survival plan rfs nsw'.

everyone loves Jake

Steven French continues his delightful series of snapshots from his family farm in northern Tasmania.

I have said it before: everyone loves our mini foxy, Jake. He hasn't an enemy in the world. Even ewes with lambs are quite happy for him to be around. Normally they would head butt a dog, but they will touch noses with Jake and are content for him to mosey around with the lambs.

Hens with chickens, calves, Missy the donkey, cats, other dogs — it doesn't matter. Jake gets on with them all.





One rooster is plenty for ten hens. Besides, two roosters will fight.

Claire Bickle of Brisbane, EG's much-admired chook guru, imparts more chook wisdom answering the tough questions.

Q We have never had chooks and finished the coop this week and my husband has purchased ten hens and two roosters. What should we feed them? We grow food for a living so there's a big variety of fresh vegies we can feed them, but should I supplement with chook food/grain? What else should I have ready for them?
Meg, Far North Qld.

A You will need to have a good quality poultry feed high in protein to feed them daily, such as a layer mash or layer pellets. They will need this feed to be put into some sort of poultry feeder container. And the bag of feed needs

to be kept in a vermin proof container (metal dust bins work well).

A regular supply of greens is important, as is fresh water. Once again you will need to have a proper poultry drinker of some description for their water. In their coop they will need a roost to roost on at night and nesting boxes and an absorbent bedding on the floor – hemp, sawdust work well.

Make sure your coop is predator proof against foxes, feral cats and dogs, snakes, goannas and so forth. And I think you may find the two roosters may fight a lot causing stress amongst the flock and harm to themselves. Just keep an eye on them.

Q I thought one of my hens was being a freeloader, as there had been no eggs. And today I discovered a new laying and a stash of eggs. Why would she have changed where she was laying her eggs?
Angela, Logan Qld.

A I had a friend who had a similar situation. We concluded that it was because she had a broody, very cranky hen sitting in one of the nesting boxes. This hen also took it upon herself to guard against anyone else laying in the other boxes too. So, the other hens just went and found a new spot to lay without the drama and confrontation – behind the compost bin.



Alternate nest!

Hens will also lay elsewhere, if there aren't enough laying boxes, or they are being bullied. Ensure you have enough nesting boxes, check for bullying and broody hens. And make sure you have good bedding material in the boxes too, this can encourage them to lay there as well if they have started to have wanderlust.

Q Is there anything I can feed chooks, or put in their beds or pen to help prevent/deter lice? Otherwise, what is the best way to get rid of them?
Brookelyn, Toowoomba, Qld.

A I have found a combination things can work. Diatomaceous earth spread round the coop, especially nesting boxes and dusted through their feathers works well. You must wear a face mask though because of the fine dusty particles. Garlic in their diet either as is chopped up, or a clove crushed in a litre of water (change daily). You have to do these things consistently not just a one-off. The sulphur in the garlic appears to make the chickens skins less palatable to the parasites.

When it comes to plants, planting highly aromatic herbs such as wormwood, dogbane, lavender, rosemary, scented geraniums, perennial basil, lemon verbena, southernwood and curry bush around pens can be helpful. And chopping some of these up and placing them on the coop floor and in the nesting boxes will also help repel external parasite as they don't like the strong plant oils.

If all else fails, there are some topical treatments that can be purchased from your vet or produce store but keep in mind these strong chemicals will mean that there will be a withholding period on egg consumption. Be sure to read all the details and instructions before use.

Q Why is my chicken laying this tiny egg?
Karen, NSW.

A Sometimes a hen will lay what we call a 'fairy egg' when something has disturbed her reproductive cycle. It simply means your hen didn't release a yolk before her body started producing an egg to enclose it. Hens at the start or the end of the laying season and even the start or end of their laying life can have a few hiccups in their egg production. It is nothing to really be concerned about.

Q I acquired four hens at the start of the Covid-19 situation and am new to chook keeping. I would like to know why they haven't laid any eggs since late March? None are moulting, they are healthy and happy, and have a varied diet of scratch mix, porridge, sardines, vegie scraps. I don't know what else to do, any ideas?
Valerie, South Australia.

A Depending on what breed they are most hens have a break from laying over the winter period. As the days



Wormwood to help deter parasites around and in the coop.



A fairy egg.

shorten this is their cue to take a break. And as the days lengthen (coming into spring) they will start to lay again. Hybrid layers quite often lay through the winter months having had this 'take a break' bred out of them.

Other factors that can hinder egg production can be the age of the hens? Too young, getting old; not enough protein in their diet and not having a balanced diet. And lastly, could something be stealing the eggs before you collect them? Crows, snakes, rats and even chickens will eat their own eggs if they are not getting a balanced diet and clean fresh water to drink. Tell-tale sign will be egg yolk on the feathers around their mouths.

Cauliflower and AVOCADO TREATS

Jessie Kapitola of Perth continues her nutritional look at gardening and cooking with kids.

I LOVE time in my garden. I love time in my kitchen. And I love time with my little ones . . . especially as they are rapidly turning into not-so-little ones!

So how much better when I get to combine three of the things I love the most – time with my kids as we garden and then into the kitchen to cook?!

Our kids have been getting their hands dirty in the garden and the kitchen from the time they were tiny. It didn't happen by accident – It was important to us, so we have worked at it deliberately, and trust me, there's been a lot of mess and chaos along the way! But what it means is that they know where a lot of their food comes from, they know about how our food changes with the seasons, and they are not afraid to have a go, of cooking or eating!

Cauliflower is one of our favourite things to grow . . . it is quite a fast-growing crop and the heads are so impressive to kids. It is also one of my

favourite things to eat – a love affair that started very early in life, picking my first homegrown one at two! Cauliflower is so nutrient rich. It's definitely a vegie that you want to introduce for healthy little bodies! High in fibre for a healthy gut, and a rich source of vitamin C, K, B6, Folate, even potassium and magnesium, plus it contains a lot of water so it contributes towards hydration levels.

We love cauliflower raw and dipped in hummus, or roasted with some good olive oil and nutritional yeast. But when we have a big crop of cauliflower, our go-to is creamy cauliflower soup. Such gorgeous comfort food which will both nourish and fuel you. It is vegan and allergy friendly plus it is a light creamy colour . . . which is usually a fairly safe colour for kids who are hesitant eaters.

If you are introducing soup to little ones who are unsure, serve it with some bread or crispy toast to dip in, as a less pressured way for them to start trying the meal.



Jessie's first cauliflower in 1984.



Jessie with some of her freshly-harvested avocados.

At this time of year, we are also delighting in our avocado trees and their gorgeous crop of baubles! The kids love to pick them. We live on a small suburban block in Perth but our little trees have come a long way in a couple of years and give us a wonderful crop! With their delicious creamy texture, amazing heart-healthy fats and versatility, we use them in so many things; with eggs for breakfast, in salads and burgers, on top of their favourite Mexican meals, blended in to add great fats and creaminess to smoothies. But one of my favourites, is in cake. Yep – chocolate cake!



Creamy cauliflower soup.

CREAMY CAULIFLOWER SOUP

1 1/2 large heads cauliflower (approximately 1.2kg), chopped
 2 tbsp garlic olive oil
 1 medium brown onion, diced
 6 medium stalks celery, chopped
 1 400g tin butter beans, drained
 3 tsp fresh chopped thyme and rosemary
 Pinch pink salt flakes
 few grinds black pepper
 4 tbsp nutritional yeast
 100g sunflower seed butter (or other nut butter)
 8 cups hot vegie stock
 Fist sized piece of sweet potato, peeled and diced.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan. Add in the onion and celery. Fry, stirring regularly until onion is golden.

Add beans, cauliflower, sweet potato and herbs. Sweat down for 3–4 minutes.

Add stock and bring to simmer, roughly 15–20 minutes (until you can slide a fork easily into the vegies).

Add salt, pepper, yeast and seed butter then use an immersion blender until the soup is perfectly smooth.

Makes 10 to 12 serves.

CHOCOLATE AVOCADO CAKE

Instead of butter, this cake uses the delicious, creaminess of avocado and richness of olive oil to provide the fats. Delicious and nutritious. Don't worry, despite the unusual ingredients, there's no taste of the hidden avocado when it's baked. It is very much kid approved!

1 3/4 cups plain flour (we use half wholemeal)
 2 tsp baking powder
 1 cup sugar (we like the caramel flavour of coconut sugar)
 2 tbsp cocoa
 70g very ripe avocado
 2 tbsp olive oil
 1 cup milk of choice
 1 tsp vanilla bean paste
 1 egg
 Optional extra: 1/3 cup hemp seeds

Mix together all dry ingredients and whisk to combine evenly. Set aside.

In your blender or processor the milk, avocado, vanilla, olive oil and egg then blitz until smooth.

Add the wet mix to the dry mix and fold ingredients



Yummy chocolate avocado cake.

together until well combined and smooth. Fold through the hemp seeds at this point if you're adding them for a little extra protein.

Pour into a lined, greased cake tin or approximately 4 regular muffin holes. Bake in a pre-heated, moderate oven for approximately 40 minutes (for the cake) or 25 minutes for the muffins, or until a skewer comes out clean.

Allow them to cool and then dust with icing sugar – or some chocolate icing if you want to be extra decadent! Enjoy!

in times of darkness...

LET A LITTLE LIGHT IN

Rachel Altenbacher, EG's much-loved permaculture homesteader from the mid-north coast of NSW, describes a few of the twists and turns she endured over last bushfire season and its Covid lockdown aftermath.

EVERYTHING has changed, it's all so different now. When I first started homesteading there was a harmonious balance in nature and an abundance of resources to trade and share.

Then rivers ran dry, lush pasture turned to dust and once-thriving watering holes became empty pits of cracked open earth. The land was on fire, not long after that came torrential floods and then the world went into lockdown. It was the ultimate test of resilience, as an advocate for sustainability and also as a human just trying to survive. Adapting to challenges has always been a strength of mine and yet intuition guided me to be still.

Some days seem uneventful until I walk out to the alpaca paddock where a dozen spirited ladies gallop towards me with the rolling rhythm of a camel. A wonderful way to heighten our experience of oneness is being welcomed into a tribe even though we are the odd one out. Many have questioned why I chose to be self-reliant however it only takes a deep breath of awareness to remember I didn't choose this lifestyle, I grew into it. The journey

already began in my early twenties as I travelled overseas seeking 'self-discovery' disguised as culture and sight seeing.

During the fires I volunteered with disaster recovery offering support to impacted families preparing hampers and being a shoulder to lean on. We

needed to act fast, assisting those who were in a state of shock (which included wildlife). So friends and I made bird feeders by gluing seed together with flour paste and distributed shallow water dishes in burnt bush land.

Stevie from Stevie's place chicken



Supporting local farmers markets and farm gate stalls is going to be a crucial aspect of recovery in areas affected by drought, fire and flood.



Rachel with her tribe of spirited ladies who welcome the sight of green grass after being hand fed hay daily during the dry spell.

rescue and her brother Issac painted rock drops reading “kindness changes everything,” “you are not alone” and “keep going” to uplift spirits. They were also very excited to know my original rescue hens are still alive and healthy.

I helped restore gardens in the community and used indoor plants as energising visual healing. My amazing green thumb friend Cath from Cath’s plants and produce donated vegie seeds for the kids’ projects I was working on as well as provided valuable horticulture knowledge. We share the same philosophy that offering assistance and shinning a little light in the shadow of darkness is a hand up not a hand out.

Then we distributed seedlings to assist anyone who found it difficult

to source food during the pandemic. And our local outreach ran fresh food Fridays. I cooked giant casseroles and froze portions for friends who had done the same for Mum and I.

I lost heart for a while and when rain finally set in I was too exhausted. Yet, to my delight, gardens grew a variety of produce from seeds dormant underground. I planted chicory and red mustard as cover crops over existing beds and, through soft foliage, turmeric and comfrey burst out of the soil. Dried manure on top of alpaca wool rings around lifeless trunks were my last ditch effort which — extraordinarily — saved dozens of fruit trees.

Trombone zucchini flowers orchestrated a symphony of beneficial



Turmeric reappeared out of nowhere, along with comfrey which lay dormant in the soil.

Rachel, Stevie and Issac made 'Rock drops' with messages of hope to uplift the community in time of crisis and show people they are thought of.

insects swarming the vegie patch, green tree frogs miraculously returned and an array of bird life sought refuge. The entire property was alive with an uplifting energy, the land regenerated and my outlook renewed.

Witnessing our ecosystem functioning holistically again was beautiful — even the sight of weeds brought tears of joy. Purslane filled the orchard and required correct identification before eating as well as monitoring as it can be toxic to livestock in high doses. Pat Collins reminds us weeds are communicating either a lack or excess of nutrients is present in the ground. They are important indicators we often discard so before laying matting to cover up, I opened a few of Pat's books and uncovered several useful insights. Dock and oxalis-wood sorrel were already growing in the orchard and make a wonderful addition to foraged salad.

It became clear I had to realign with simplicity when I watched three year old Indy harvest seeds and scatter them in the enchanting food forest where he lives with his parents — two of my best friends Troy and Sophie at Ma and Pa Permaculture. Indy wasn't concerned with opinions of others, he planted seeds where *he* decided and wished them well. In a bid to achieve instant results we can spend far too much time trying to replicate exactly what others have. Instead with a little creativity we could invent our own revolutionary ideas and start a new trend.

The last time I saw Indy he helped me pot up pink Lagos spinach that was growing outside the boundaries and we pondered possibilities of how they got there. In exchange I offered wormwood as it proved to be a resilient herb and a blessing of a plant to deter insects.

Troy pointed out the cassava cuttings I propagated last year thriving as a mid layer canopy in his syntropic design and



One of Rachel's favourite salads inspired by her Grandmother who added fresh fruit and nuts to super sized salads to feed the neighbourhood.

"It became clear I had to realign with simplicity when I watched three year old Indy harvest seeds and scatter them in the enchanting food forest where he lives with his parents."



Rachel and Indy surrounded by the enchanting pumpkin forest at Ma and Pa permaculture.

mentioned he was able to strike the Ukrainian cucumbers I sadly lost during drought. I felt relief knowing we could swap resources and during isolation the daily bike ride up to the letterbox to trade seeds with friends all over the country became a ritual I really looked forward to. I'm grateful Troy, Sophie, Indy and baby Oscar are part of my soul family. We gel because each of us has heard a call to awaken, regardless of whether it was a gentle whisper or a drastic shake up.

The solution to creating a better life lies in our willingness to seek interconnected relationships. The greater our desire to see others healthy the more we are rewarded with our own health. Indy and I walk hand in hand through the pumpkin patch to discover a little mulberry tree and immediately start rustling leaves from side to side looking for a bounty of fruit.

Indy reaches in and retrieves two berries, one he puts straight in his mouth and the other he hands to me: "This one's for you Aunty Rach". And that my friends is my internal light.



Donations of seeds from Cath's plants and produce which greatly encouraged community growing and rehabilitation of garden.



Troy harvesting a bumper crop of beets.

Ma and Pa

PERMACULTURE

Troy Roberts and Sophie Manolas share their journey of establishing Ma and Pa permaculture on the NSW Mid North Coast alongside a community of our younger generation seeking to improve their quality of life — including their good friend, EG writer, Rachel Altenbacher.

WE ARE a young couple who are forging a better future for our family. We steward and live on 20 acres based strongly on permaculture principles and ethics. We wish to forge a farm which captures and stores mass carbon while regenerating and beautifying the land and obtaining yields. Most of our food systems have thrived through terrible drought but we can't pretend it's been without sacrifice.

Running buckets of water from the bath tub and kitchen sink has been

common practice for most of us over the past couple of years but is some of this drudgery due to drought or poor design? If I'm honest with myself and accept feedback from Nature, it is quite obviously poor design.

I attended a 'Permaculture Design Certificate' (PDC) at Limestone Permaculture in 2018 which really steered us in the right direction. Having a tangible plan was a great starting point. It will change no doubt through observation and the system

maturing. It was helpful looking at how we could improve what we'd already started. Being an arborist I am drawn to successional agroforestry (syntropic farming) with a dream of running livestock through tree rows for a plethora of reasons. Being a father to a three year old and a one month old, I'm realistic in distinguishing between 'want' and 'need' because time is precious.

Designing food systems which can withstand extreme weather is the first step to doing more of the things you



The chicken tractor can be moved around the farm.



Time for another barrowload of mulch.



Laying the foundations for the kitchen garden.

love. Planning has empowered us and saves a great deal of wasted energy. A site sector analysis helped with orientation for winter/summer sun availability, what directions damaging winds come from, and which areas are frost prone. Fire, flood, livestock, predatory animal threat and so on dictate what and where elements of our homestead should go and how they can function holistically in an integrated system.

Next was a concept plan, listing

what goes where in permaculture zones.

Dream big, be honest with the money, resources and most importantly time available. Savour the time dedicated to planning and observing your site with loved ones and reap an abundance of fresh, beyond-organic produce that sound design provides. To us, permaculture is a way of enriching our lives beyond the garden and homestead. Taoist philosophy has been of great inspiration to us of late: “by harmonising and integrating one’s

consciousness with life; with totality” is the way of the Tao.

We can immerse ourselves in the depths of raw nature — many people talk about this, but often find hard to describe: a certain ‘energy’, ‘vibe’ or ‘feeling’ that a certain place holds. Not ‘knowing’, but ‘appreciating’ can be a more rewarding human experience. Maybe it’s an intrinsic part of human nature to over-complicate the most profound, beautiful and deepest of earthly experiences.

MAKE YOUR OWN

solar food dryer

As the sun climbs higher in the sky over Spring, **Nev Sweeney** of St Clair in NSW shows us how building a cheap homemade solar food dryer can be a fun project.

DRYING excess food from the garden is a great way to spread the harvest and create new tastes. A solar dryer is even better because it uses the sun rather than electricity. And one made from a polystyrene vegie box is even better again because it turns a waste stream into a useful tool for sustainable living.

But why a polystyrene vegie box?

- there is little or no cost.
- the polystyrene foam acts as an insulator to keep the heat where you need it, around the food you are drying.
- it is rigid enough to form a good base.
- with the right tools it is easy to work.
- it's light and easy to transport.
- the right type of vegie box takes only a little work to make it into a solar dryer.

HOW DO YOU MAKE IT?

Once you've selected your vegie box you can either cut it first or paint it first, so I decided to paint it first. This involves using a water based matt black paint to coat the inside, allowing the sunlight to be captured to heat up the air inside the dryer. The paint must be water-based because solvent-based paint, even in a spray pack, will melt the polystyrene foam to a greater or lesser extent. Finding water-based matt black paint proved surprisingly difficult but in the end I found a water-based blackboard paint at our local hardware which I applied with a soft paint brush

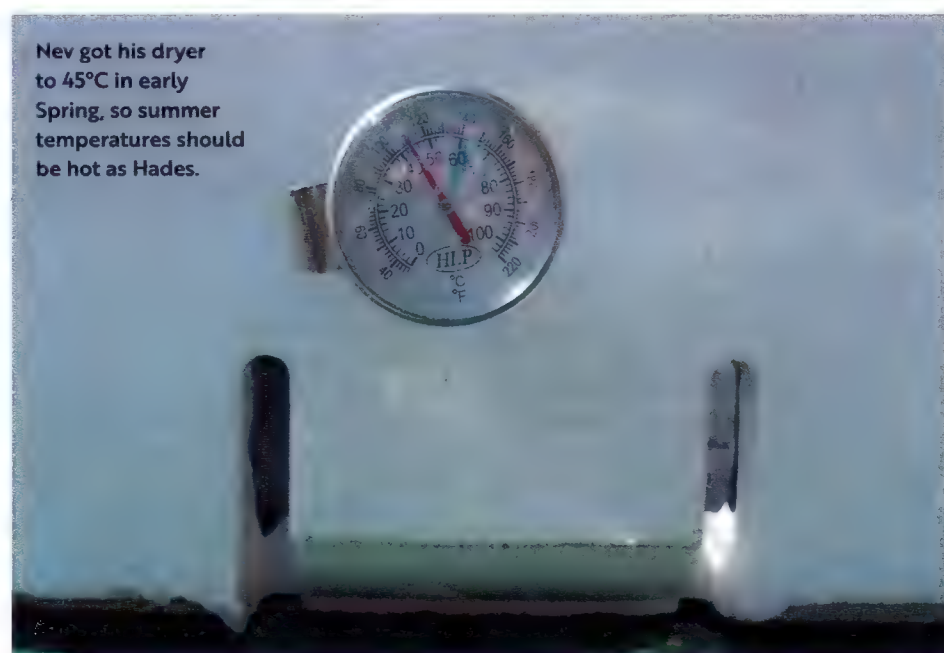
and it worked really well.

If your vegie box has high sides, greater than say 10 to 12 cm, it is a good idea to cut three sides down to form a slope to let more sunlight (and heat) in by reducing the shading effect of the sides. To do this, measure down the two corners that will become the front of the dryer an equal length such that the resulting 'front' will be about 10-12cm high and run a pencil line between the two points. A metal one metre ruler is handy to use for this. Then run the ruler back along each side from the mark up to the back of the box so that the line on the front continues diagonally along the side and

up to the back of the box.

To cut the sides and front down it is easiest to use a hot wire cutter (see the hay box cooker article in EG 193). To get the best possible line, hold a steel ruler or straight edge of some description on the line and run the hot wire cutter down it, making sure to keep the wire perpendicular to the side of the box. This gives a smooth, straight edge which makes fitting the clear cover much easier.

Now you have a box with a sloping top, but next you need a clear cover to let the sun in, heat up the inside of the box, and dry the food. The best cover is glass and a piece of recycled window





The right type of vegie box takes only a little work.



Water-based blackboard paint from the local hardware.



A simple drying rack and a glass top.



Thick plastic will work as a top.

the right size does the job. I had a recycled sliding glass door out of an old kitchen dresser which, as luck would have it, was just the right size.

If you don't have any glass you can make a cheap and much lighter alternative top by getting hold of some corrugated cardboard from a big box or whatever and cutting a piece to the size of the top of the dryer. Then cut a window out of the piece of cardboard so that there is a border 10 to 20mm wide, then cut a piece of recycled plastic sheet (we used the plastic bag from around our new mattress) to the size of the outside of the cardboard. Tape the plastic to the top of the cardboard with 50mm duct or gaffer tape and you have a light, transparent window that sits on the top of the solar dryer.

The carcass of the dryer is finished but the holes are still open and if you have bug problems — a possibility with drying vegies, probability with drying

fruit and a definite with drying meat — you will need to screen off the air holes on the bottom and sides of the box to keep the bugs out.

The cheapest way to do this is to tape some old fly screen from recycled window screens over the holes; the box is well insulated so the tape won't get hot on the outside. If you have some spare cash you can get hold of some self-adhesive screen patches used to repair fly screens and stick that on the bottom and sides of the box. The patches look neater and can be cut to the correct size but will cost you more.

So, now you have the outer box completed all you need to start drying is a rack to go inside to allow air circulation right around the produce. A cheap cake cooling rack will work but will only have bars going in one direction and may need to have a covering of (well cleaned) fly screen to stop small bits of food falling through. For two to three times the

price of a cheap rack you can have a better one than will be bigger, stronger and wires going both ways to form a cross hatched pattern — much better for supporting the food.

As the sun shines through the glass or plastic top and heats the food and the air, the warm air rises, taking some of the moisture from the food and dragging in fresh air from the sides and bottom, and then exits at the back of the top part of the dryer. The process continues until the food is dried to your specification.

With the dryer pointed at the sun here on an afternoon in early spring I was easily able to achieve 45°C so as the weather warms, the performance of the dryer should improve too. All up, assuming paying for the box, paint and drying rack but being able to get hold of the materials to make the window, my solar dryer cost me about \$5. Not a bad investment.

THE UNLEARNED COUNTRY

Dr Philip Zylstra* has studied fires throughout Southern Australia going back to the start of white occupation. Here he tackles the myths and mistakes that have created our fire-prone landscape.

I ONCE sat with Fred Fletcher in Whites River Hut in the Kosciuszko National Park, listening to his stories of the years when he had leased the country to run sheep. As a young man in 1939 he had stood on the high crags and watched furnace winds drive flames up the western fall of the Main Range. Fred was one of many I spent time with, reconstructing the story and creating the first-ever map of the Black Friday fires in NSW. That map resurfaced recently when the great champion of climate inaction Bjørn Lomborg downloaded it and it was posted on the page of Craig Kelly MP, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Friends of Australian Coal Exports.

Mr Kelly was attempting to say that we shouldn't see this season's fires as

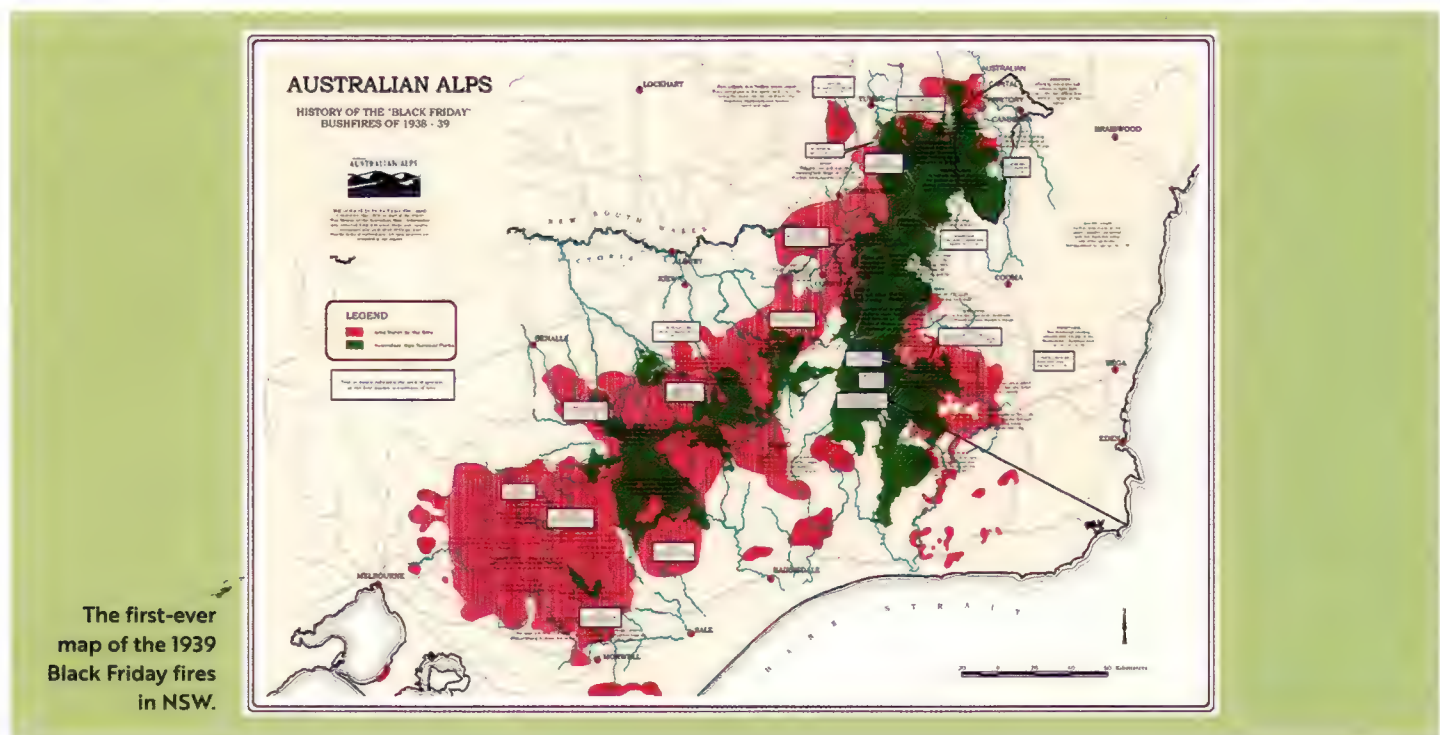
unusual because big fires have happened before. 1939 was a good example, possibly the biggest of that era in our part of the country. The question is though: do these events make the point that Mr Kelly thinks they do? Here's the answer from the book, but I suspect he didn't read it.

In that book, I travelled Fred's old snow lease country with him. At one stage I asked him if he ever burnt the shrubs. "Heather? No. Some did, but they came back thicker."

Alpine ecologists have long reported that fact, and Fred wasn't the only grazer to see it. Roy Hedger used to run sheep near Mt Jagungal, and he said, "We would never burn bush country as it would make it worse and bring suckers up."

Richard Helms had written in 1893: "A common and in my opinion a very improvident practice, which will probably be continued, is the constant burning of the forest and scrubs. This proceeding has only a temporary beneficial effect in regard to the improvement of the pasture by the springing up of young grass in places so cleared, for after a year or so the scrub and underwood spring up more densely than ever..."

Recently, I looked at every fire mapped across these mountains for nearly 60 years, and I found one thing in common from the foothills to the peaks: fire has always followed fire. For a couple of years, it brought quiet, then the undergrowth made the forests up to eight times more likely to re-burn for





Whites River Hut in the Snowy Mountains is now part of the Kosciuszko National Park.

“Part of Australia’s whitewashing of history is the story that we burn the bush because that’s what Aboriginal people always did. When there are big fires, the answer is always the same: ‘we should have burnt more’.

the next couple of decades until it self-thinned. So why did anyone burn it if this was the result? The answer lies in something else Fred said: he called the shrubs ‘heather’.

Heather is the dominant shrub on the moors of the British Isles, but not naturally so. The moors used to be forest, but they had been cleared for grazing by burning them repeatedly. That practice reached a peak in the early 19th century—right when such graziers moved to Australia. High-country grazing became dominated by big pastoral companies that were based interstate or even overseas, and these companies often employed people to do one thing: set fire to the forest as they had done in England. There were the little men like Fred who watched and learned, but then there were the big men, the corporate burners.

Part of Australia’s whitewashing of

history is the story that we burn the bush because that’s what Aboriginal people always did. When there are big fires, the answer is always the same: we should have burnt more. We send out crews with drip torches, vehicle-mounted incendiary launchers and helicopters dropping fire across vast landscapes, but it’s still, apparently, not as much burning as the First Nations did on foot with fire sticks.

Townsend said in 1846: “The Blacks had visited the Snowy Mountains, a short time previously to us, for the purpose of getting ‘Bogongs’, a species of moth, about an inch long, of which they are particularly fond; to obtain them they light large fires, and the consequence was, the country throughout the whole survey was burnt...”.

Notice that Townsend didn’t see anyone lighting fires, he just assumed

‘the Blacks’ had done it. In 1895 though, Richard Helms watched moth hunting. The technique was to wave a burning branch over the moths clustered on the cave walls, so that they fell off onto a skin or net. Although this seems a better way to catch moths, our stories favour Townsend’s version where hunters set up camp then lit massive bushfires around themselves at the height of summer.

This is our great fire myth: that First Nations peoples used simple, savage fire. But they didn’t. The little I’ve learnt from elders describes an extraordinarily complex system of controlled burning and exclusion, acquired over one thousand times the span of Mr Kelly’s life.

But when the Scottish ‘pioneer’ Angus McMillan opened up the high-country for grazing, he didn’t sit at the feet of the elders to learn. He



Mountain Gums at Tumbarumba on the western side of the Snowy Mountains.

rounded them up, massacring up to 100 at a time. Townsend's survey area was burnt because the invaders were British graziers who cleared country using fire. The snowgums tell the story: a seven-fold increase in fire scars when the invasion came.

So it is that while the Black Friday fires raged 100 years later, Fred Fletcher stood on Dicky Cooper's Bogong on a Saturday afternoon, watching fire roar up from the deepest valley in Australia. In the following Victorian Royal Commission, Judge Stretton made clear: 'these fires were lit by the hand of man,' just as they had been in every other massive fire since invasion.

It took until the 1950s before Governments successfully stopped people burning in dangerous conditions, but when they did, the massive fires stopped. Immediately. Big fires did still occur — my dad remembers well driving his bread truck through the eerie darkness of Kiandra in the '64-65 Ravine fire; but these rarely topped 100,000 hectares. They burnt across the mountains ahead of a front, then were contained after taking their run. The million-hectare fires of the past were an order of magnitude larger, but these had only happened when people lit many fires at once.

If that was the end of the story, it would be a happy one. Half a century

passed without a million-hectare fire when before, there had been one nearly every decade. During that time, however, something else had been happening. The 'dark Satanic mills' of the 19th century now dominated the globe. New machines dug fossils from where they had hidden beneath the earth, and we burned them into the atmosphere to power our need for new stuff to throw away.

Scientists warned it would change the climate, but the coal and oil giants paid for marketers to confuse the population, paid for politicians to protect their share prices. And the whole earth warmed, until one Saturday in January 2003, a storm front bathed the length of the Australian Alps in lightning. I didn't see thunderclouds that day, just heat, haze and hot wind; and the million-hectare fires had returned.

Lightning and drought have since begun to dominate our hemisphere: they burnt another million hectares of the Alps three years later, then incinerated ancient Tasmanian pencil pines. We no longer needed people to light million-hectare fires; we had made the climate do it for us.

This season past though, we were warned that something else was coming, yet another change. The air over Antarctica had been overheated. Without

people to help them, the big fires of the past had burnt hundreds of thousands of hectares. This year we saw fires burn over ten million hectares: one hundred times bigger than 'natural'. Lit by lightning, consuming forests dying for water, many thick with shrubs from burning; now fanned by the dry winds of a collapsed polar vortex. Forests finally burnt that had held off fire since Gondwana: here is the Promised Land to which our salesmen politicians have led us.

Craig Kelly said 1939 showed that massive fires have always happened, but it didn't. It showed that they only occur when there are massive ignitions. We cause these when we burn too much land and too much coal: burnt offerings to little born-to-rule gods who take what they want.

But we're not gods, we're just one of the species. If we don't learn this, we will be just one of the species in the next coal seam. This is the year when we decide.

**Dr Philip Zylstra is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for Sustainable Ecosystem Solutions, University of Wollongong.*

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SYMBOL OF HOPEFUL LIVING

Janine and Sanj have designed and created a green, cool and flourishing garden and Brydie Piaf of Newcastle goes to wander about and admire.

FROM the first step into the yard you feel the world gently slow down. With phone cast aside, all notifications of an outside world are quickly muted — you're free instead to take in the language of the garden. A cluck of a contented chicken, the soft touch of parsley gone to seed, bees dancing over ground cover blossoms and importantly — giggles of a barefoot childhood.

When you live in a time of global climate crisis you can see how a garden like this easily becomes a symbol of hopeful

living. Walking amongst the sea of green, it's here Janine and Sanj have created a multi-layered hub of biodiversity.

A space of constant learning. Not only for themselves but also for their young son Ryan. Following a natural progression of vegetable beds to chickens, chickens to bees, every single success and challenge has led to further confidence in their garden growing. Where wonky vegetables are admired and valued for their taste, sharing passionfruit with possums has become commonplace

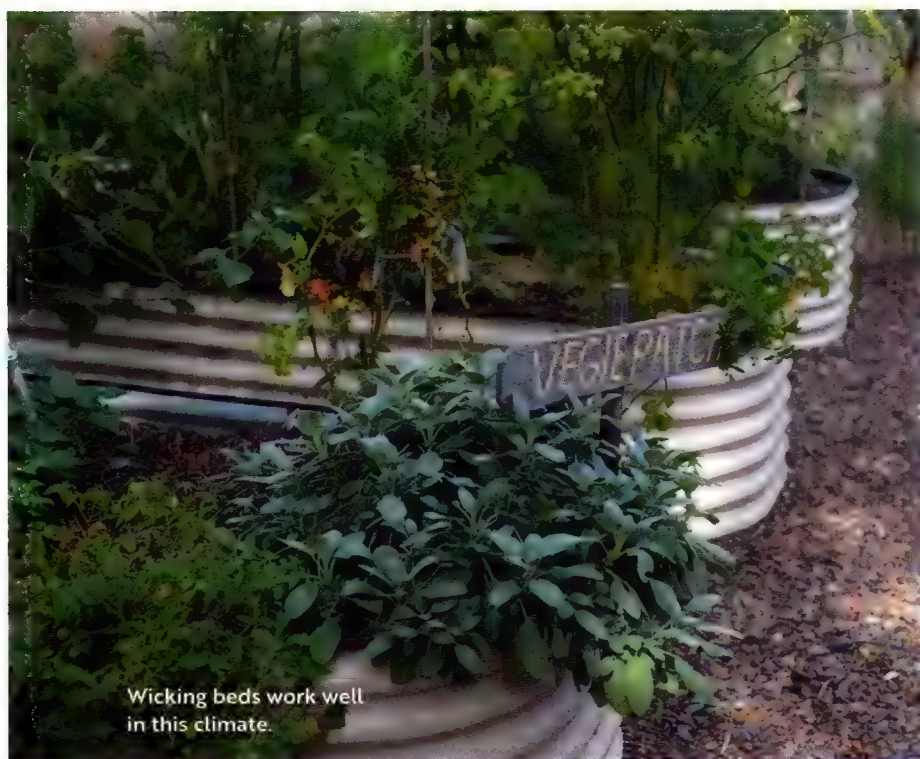
and sometimes they have to bury the occasional chook.

As needs, knowledge and the ever-changing climate have all shifted over time, so too has their gardening focus. While neither had grown up with a love for gardening, it became obvious early on to both Janine and Sanj: gardening was something they both really enjoyed. After a modest start of assorted potted herbs and tomatoes, the lure of homegrown produce was well and truly planted.

Confidence growing, so too did their



Janine and Sanj



Wicking beds work well in this climate.



Growing capers.



European honey bees pollinate the many vegies.

garden plans. Moving into the area just under ten years ago, there was now 1400 square metres of growing potential to play with.

“That was one of the main reasons for buying the property here. We really wanted to have a space where we could create something special. We weren’t too fussed about the house really, it was all about the garden,” says Janine. “Growing up in South Africa, my parents always had a fairly big garden, which I had to be dragged into as a teenager. But obviously somewhere deep down mum managed to influence me. She has amazing green fingers and has been a huge inspiration for this garden.”

Inspired to simply grow more, the new digs came with just a couple of priorities: space to have a really functional vegetable patch, whilst also leaving enough room for family ball games.

“In the beginning it was all about growing food in the vegie patch, but then we realised there’s this amazing space to create a whole edible garden, not just in a vegetable bed,” says Janine. “That was really exciting, going ‘Okay, I’m not going to plant a tree just for its decorative purposes, I’m actually going to choose something that’s going to be an environment for insects — while also something we could eat’. That was a big change in the first two years of planting

and then moving into the next eight years of planting.”

As the garden evolved, so too have those priorities. With both working long hours as oncology doctors and Ryan in school, Sanj and Janine needed the garden space to be as low maintenance as possible. Spending long gardening days at this point in life wasn’t really a possibility. The design had to work hard for them.

Grassed areas quickly shrank (turns out ball games can be played on a much smaller area), replaced instead with edibles or pollinator-friendly ground cover plants (‘Sun Rose’ is a favourite). Janine and Sanj regularly added to the soil with a combination of compost or chook manure — creating a growing environment that is as high yielding as possible.

And that vital component water? Harvesting water was always a high priority. By having that initial focus it’s meant that despite drought conditions in recent years, their garden has never had to do without. With 13,000 litres of water over four assorted tanks, an additional simple greywater method, a variety of wicking beds and dedicated mulching — the garden continues to flourish. Resilient even during periods of excessive prolonged dry and hot weather.

“With the longer, warmer seasons we’ve noticed a lot earlier spring growth, creating a far greater challenge for plants struggling on those really hot days,” says Sanj. “Things that thrive one year and



Sanj, Janine and Ryan.

then not the next year — although if they aren't doing so well, then something else will usually step in, providing food for us. It's the unpredictability, it certainly adds to the excitement of the garden."

Taking that unpredictability and climatic changes into account, the couple continue to make sure that any new additions planted make simple environmental sense. While several of the trees (in the initial design stage) were chosen with potential flammability in mind, those denser canopies have now helped create a lush growing environment that rarely takes the hits that it previously had.

That ability to listen to the language of the garden is an important one, and one often ignored. "I guess sometimes it's also just realising you have to change what you

think and do, it's going to be hotter. After the last avocado tree was burnt, maybe we need to think about planting another in a different position, I'm not expecting the climate to get cooler."

While Sanj and Janine have managed to create an environment that is as prepared and resilient as possible, like many people around Australia living within close proximity to large amounts of bushland they've had to think about what they would do in the event of a bushfire. With the horrific summer gone by, it changes the way you think, the way you look at things, the way you do things.

"I think it can't not," says Janine. "It's been so terrifying to see the footage of our bush on fire. We've been in a sort of bubble living in this suburb. We do have bush very close to us and if there were a

fire there'd definitely be embers. We're all at risk, wherever we are. It's just luck."

As the weather cools, the garden easily steps back into the familiar role of family haven. Weekends spent inspecting the vegies coming on, hammock beckoning to anyone walking by, a constant hum of bees following you about and the laugh of a child as a ball is flung past the chook shed.

It's moments like these that are important — pushing you forward when times are harder and more challenging. It's a space to step into, to learn from and an opportunity to listen to the unique language that a garden has.

Ultimately though? Our gardens plant hope, serving as a wonderful reminder of just how enjoyable these spaces can be.

Stayin' Alive Stayin' Alive

Nicki and Dan Power from Hazelcombe Farm in the Mudgee district of NSW are well-known to EG readers. They, like all landholders in their region, have been battling the devastating effects of drought. Here **Nicki** examines the issue in depth.

WE'RE in drought – serious drought. Our neighbour Lyn moved to our valley 40 years ago, and she reckons she's never seen it this bad. When young, but mature, trees start dying and kangaroo mothers start abandoning their way-too-young joeys to fend for themselves, when the lyrebirds and koalas come out of the bush for feed and water and wombats and kangaroos start to break the taps off tanks to get to your precious remaining water supplies, you know

you're in trouble.

What's really scaring us is that huge areas of the bush surrounding us are dying – the eucalypts, the understorey, all of it. And it's not just us. The whole district, north and south of Mudgee is talking about the bush dying. I have a hypothesis that this has been happening up and down the East Coast of Australia and is a major reason we had mega bushfires this past summer. No, Scott, it is not just arsonists whom you can blame for the bushfires.

SO IT'S TIME TO TAKE STOCK...

During the last major drought we decided to make sure there was a decent-sized tank off every roof and that they were all connected. What a blessing! We have tank capacity of about 400,000 litres but we haven't had good rain for quite a while so there's not a lot of that left. All up, we now have about 45,000 litres left for the household, the garden and the few remaining animals, including the wildlife. It sounds a lot, but we don't know when this is going to end.



This dieback is not the result of fire. The trees are dying from lack of ground water.



Pots of seedlings: so many trees waiting to be planted out.



Nicki and Dan's wicking bed provides them with enough for green smoothies, but they miss their big garden.

HAVE WE CHANGED OUR BEHAVIOUR? YOU BET.

- We wash the dishes once a day using as little water as possible. And that water is then carried outside and emptied into the wicking bed. Needless to say, we're very careful

with the dish washing detergent we buy, and use it sparingly.

- We wash ourselves once a day in about half a litre of water. We shower once a week using a bucket of water in an outside camp shower. We haven't used the indoor 'normal'

shower for months, not even during winter.

- Our toilets are composting toilets. The composting toilets made their way onto our farm at the end of the last major drought, and we are so grateful for them. There is nothing more soul destroying than having to cart water or even worse buying water, and then emptying it down a toilet!!
- Our vegie garden has been downsized for the duration. Instead of 100 square metres, it is now about 4 square metres and is a wicking bed. Those vegies are doing pretty well, given the conditions (we love wicking beds). Doesn't give us much, but we manage to eat something fresh out of it every day. However, we won't be preserving any vegetables this year.
- We've stopped planting new seed for the time being. Just trying to keep the young plants in the nursery and selected plants outside the nursery

"FOR ALL
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Here Nicki and Dan have started lining an eroded bank with small rocks.

alive, particularly the baby trees.

- Every plant with foliage close to the ground has to be protected. Otherwise the wildlife will strip it bare and often kill it in their desperation to find something to eat. We've never seen kangaroos strip olive trees before. They're eating them now.
- Our remaining goats are kept in a sacrificial paddock and we feed them (at great expense). We just don't want them trying to eat every last blade of grass from the rest of the paddocks. Yet we love them so wouldn't sell them. And we still want our milk and cheeses.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Surprisingly, there are enough opportunities in times like these that keep us from falling into despondency. Droughts are perfect times . . .

- To continue our efforts at creek rehabilitation. The time to start lining the erosion points with small rocks. Americans call the small rocks 'rip rap'. These create turbulence and take energy out of

the water flow (when you get water again, of course). The trick is to only slow the water, reducing its energy. Never try to stop it. Slow and steady is the mantra for this job. You can create massive erosion blow outs if you try to dam the water or slow it down too much. That's why the creek restorers talk about leaky weirs and one rock dams. Water is constantly flowing through the weirs, but not as fast, and one rock dams are a layer of rocks on the creek bed just one rock high – enough to create a riffle effect and allow sediment to drop out, not enough to dam the water.

- To clean out your wells. If you are lucky as we are, you'll have just about no water in your well so it's a perfect time for a bit of Spring cleaning!!
- To build some dams and swales to help rehydrate the land when the rains come again.
- Use drought time to test theories. How can you best protect new and established trees from wildlife? How can you grow trees even

when humidity is close to zero? Which trees are thriving despite the dry? Why? Is the soil better? Is it a hardier tree? Are you doing something else different? Is it time to start moving to desert plants – at least until those plants can create a gentler microclimate for the less hardy trees? And ... how can you ensure the wildlife gets water without destroying your pipes and taps?

So in summary, we are putting our efforts currently into "stayin' alive" – ourselves, our animals, the wildlife and our plants. In time, it will rain again and we want to be ready for it when it comes.

For all of you in a similar situation, hang in there. We are the climate change warriors. We may be like Canute, trying to hold back the tide, but at least we have a plan of action and a purpose in this apparently aimless world. And for all of you in more fortunate circumstances, think carefully about where your water and food are coming from. Taking them for granted is no longer an option.

I'LL JUST TAKE THAT THANKS



A Korean
style set table
for two.

Our highly-esteemed garden chef, **Gary Thomas**, from Daylesford in Victoria, contemplates appropriation and authenticity — and then lets us makes divine Koran pancakes.

Photography by Pete Swan

I DO THIS interview for a radio show. It is about the Slow Food Ark of Taste, and bullboar sausages, a subject I know a lot about. These sausages are an integral part of my Swiss Italian family story. Invented on the Victorian goldfields, they tell the story of our farming lives here, after leaving desperate poverty in the 19th century Swiss Alps.

The radio people are interested to know more. About the dozens of

family specific recipes, the preparation techniques, the friendly rivalry. They are delightfully interested in this niche, remnant, colonial history.

There is also a high profile guest chef in the studio. He tells me he makes bullboar sausages for one of his restaurants. I am interested and ask him politely which family recipe it is based on. He tells me he made it up himself. I ask him for the ingredients. He reels off a list of ingredients that I know is

never ever in the collected recipes.

I am shocked. I am dumbfounded. I feel robbed. I feel cheated. This man is making a quite lovely Italian sausage, I'm sure. But it is not a bullboar, should not claim to be on his menu. And it is wrong of him to say so.

Now, let's keep this in perspective. It's a sausage; meaningless compared to invasion and dispossession of land, hundreds of years of suppression, endless cultural disrespect and disregard.



Freshly washed
pancake vegetables.



"Raw vegetables are grate"
(Gary's dad joke, not mine).

But it still burns. I think a lot about cultural appropriation nowadays. Sometimes it's hard to understand where the line is. Putting on shoe nugget and a head dress is wrong, yep, I can see that. Paul Simon releases an album based on the traditional music of an indigenous culture and wins lots of awards and it doesn't seem quite right, not really fair.

Having themed parties with fancy dress? Certain hair styles? Food? A chef from Brazzaville, Congo, tells me about the need for his people to rediscover their traditional agricultural and kitchen practice after 200 years of colonial Belgian rule that had them growing potatoes and cooking *pommes frites*. And he is wearing the most magnificent animal print suit as he does so.

My cooking repertoire is full of influence — the produce I collect and grow, chefs I have worked with, dishes I have eaten in other cultures, recipe books from cuisines of the world.

We all do it, and, I guess, as long as we acknowledge the origin story, be authentic, and don't claim ownership, our copies come from a genuine place.

The key thing is respect. Mindfulness and listening ears.



Pancakes frying.
Ready to flip.

KOREAN STYLE PANCAKES

Makes 15-20 large ones

3 cups self raising flour
1 cup buckwheat flour
1-2 tsp salt
4 eggs
3 large potatoes
2 large carrots
3 medium turnips
1 cup shredded kale, destemmed
1 cup kimchi, finely chopped
Oil for frying

- Sift the flours together.
- Grate the vegetables, toss together with the kimchi and kale.
- Beat the eggs.
- Combine the vegies, flour and eggs in a large bowl. The juice from the kimchi and freshly grated vegies should be about right for the pancake batter. If dry, add a little extra water or juice. Leave to rest 15 minutes.
- Meanwhile, make the salad. Finely shred spinach and nori or wakame strands. Combine with lacto-fermented green tomato or similar. Toss with lemon juice, a light oil and crushed toasted sesame seeds to taste. Season.
- Assemble your other condiments. In this example, I have used a spicy eggplant relish, whole cucumber horseradish leaf pickle and a mayo tossed with tamari in balance.
- In a heavy frypan over moderate heat pour 1cm of oil for frying. When hot add large spoonful of batter, levelling them off, and leaving plenty of room between each one.
- Shallow fry until small bubbles begin to form on top. Gently flip and fry the same on the other side. Reserve and keep warm until all pancakes are cooked.
- Find a nice wooden platter. Place all ingredients in balance and harmony. Enjoy.



An evil troll mixes the pancake batter.



Seaweed salad.

DR WHO'S garden shed

Plants always grow towards the light. Humans may appear less reliable in this regard, says weekend hippie, Liz Ingham of (lockdown) Yarraville in Melbourne, and pre-lockdown Clydesdale. But lately we have seen communities unite to protect vulnerable members from a deadly virus and protest institutional racism. Go humans.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

During the Covid-19 lockdown, with all recreational plans cancelled, Trevor did what any sensible man would in the situation. He built a time machine.

I've always wanted one since I was a kid watching *Doctor Who* after school. Mind you, I have never needed a Tardis to travel in space and time. So far, I have gone 53 years into the future at the speed of one day per day, on the surface of a world that hurtles through space at dizzying speeds.

THE TARDIS

When we bought this place, it came with the crumbling remains of a tiny stone generator shed 30 metres from the house. The walls were mostly gone, but there was a thumping great diesel monster bolted onto a concrete slab. Oh the headaches that thing must have caused for the sake of a few lights and a

black and white telly!

If they'd seen me a few decades later, using silent electricity captured from the nearest star to power the glowing communication device on my table this evening, they'd have thought we were space aliens.

The generator shed ruins were close to the gate of the food garden, so I started dreaming of growing a little Tardis-shaped potting shed on the slab. A place to keep my tools and supplies. A little water tank off the roof and a trough where I could pot up my seedlings.

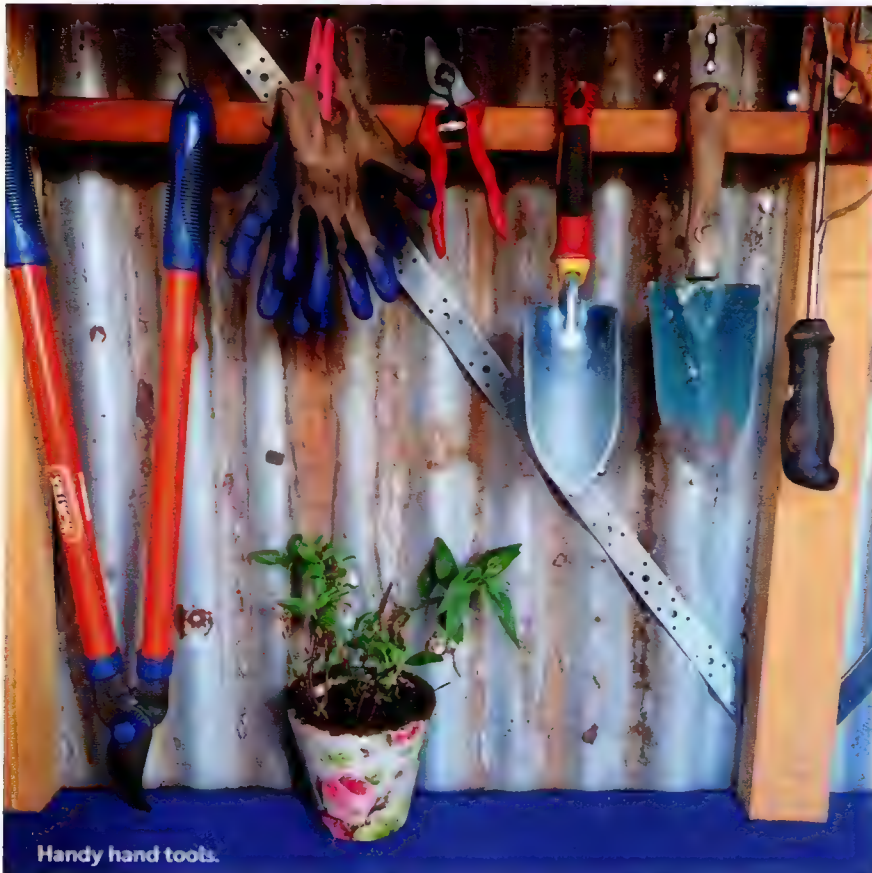
Around here, you don't need a permit for a shed if it's small and cheap, so we used materials that have travelled in time, like a set of perfectly good glass doors someone threw out, and prehistoric corrugated tin that had been rusting in place behind the Termite Shed. (The tin looks rather

fetching, but I have other plans for those walls. You'll find out next edition.)

And truly, this shed is bigger on the inside. There are shallow shelves, so the thing I need is never behind something else. My large tools are held against the walls. A workbench sits above deep space for all my empty pots and buckets of char, lime and such. The top shelf doesn't hit my head when I'm working.

The Tardis is the retirement home for bits of a classic Kelvinator fridge from Trevor's childhood. It moved with him into share houses, spent some time at my place when we became friends, then into the home we shared for the first 20-odd years.

The shed construction is based on bolts and screws, so all materials can be dismantled and re-purposed easily by future humans. They'll stay good.



“So it’s time for a review of spring propagation options that don’t need a greenhouse, to help temperate region Earth Gardeners grow all those seeds they panic-bought last Autumn.”



A compost-heated nursery bed.

I cannot tell you how much joy this little object brings me, and how it has unlocked our creativity for planning future projects!

SPRING PROPAGATION

Which reminds me. By this time next year, I’ll probably have a little greenhouse. So it’s time for a review of spring propagation options that *don’t* need a greenhouse, to help temperate region Earth Gardeners grow all those seeds they panic-bought last Autumn. The key is to heat the soil from below.

1. Make a big compost heap, nestle your seed trays into the top then turn the heap every week or so, whenever it begins to cool. Your seedlings will be

ready before the heat goes out of the compost.

2. Take the top 15cm of soil off a section of garden bed and put a mixture of food waste, wet weed clippings and chook poo into the trench. Back-fill the soil, which will be warmed by the compost brewing below. The top centimetre of soil needs to be free of weed seeds, like a mix of coconut fibre, coarse sand, finely sifted cow poo and a little potash mixed with about 50 per cent sterilised soil (remove worms from soil and bake at 180–200 °F for at least 30 minutes, or until the soil temperature reaches 180°F).

Scrounged plastic bags can be sliced open, overlapped and sewn together to make covers so the air is more tropical

for your seedies. A couple of parallel rows of zig-zag stitch works well. Use wire or trench mesh arches to make sure the plastic never touches the plants.

3. If your hot water tank is inefficient and leaks heat, put your seed tray on top. Then for goodness sakes insulate the damn thing.

4. Rest your seed tray on a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel. Wrap a blanket around the lot so the heat can only escape into the tray. Replace the hottie morning and evening.

5. Commercial heat trays don’t use much power and they work reliably. They are a good investment if you consider the value of the punnets you aren’t buying.

Happy Spring everyone! Grow well.

COVID-19 MEANS A CHANGE OF PLANS

The Berry family from inner-Melbourne describe the wonder of wwoofing after Covid-19 changes their plans for overseas homeschooling and another door opens.

WE HAD planned to spend most of 2020 travelling overseas and home-schooling our children but we suddenly found ourselves in a unique position with the travel restrictions suddenly upon us.

We had previously travelled around Australia and now we had another opportunity: to slow down and gain first-hand experience of life outside our inner-Melbourne urban lives. We knew about WWOOFing but had never done it. We're weren't a typical WWOOFing demographic but hoped that as professionals, parents and travellers, we could share insights into the lives and livelihood of WWOOF hosts.

Under the guidance and wisdom of Nikki and Gabe, WWOOF Australia hosts since 2017, we had our first WWOOFing experience in rural NSW at a beautiful bush property aptly named Faraway. Life quickly developed its own rhythm and we were soon a part of the daily workings of the property, its animals and nearby residents. The sounds of clucking chickens, and adolescent rooster calls interspersed with the myriad bird calls filled our days. There were magpies, wrens, rosellas, king parrots, bellbirds, whip birds, the waggle of the willy wag-tail and the cackling kookaburras. Croaking frogs, the wind whipping across the ridge, rain falling on the tent fly — all these sounds filled our nights . . . and yet we slept deeply.

On our working days we gathered and cleared timber from the neighbour's property, fostered and earned the love of Munchkin the Pony ("he's a boy and he's not a horse," said Ada, four years old) and acceptance of Chookie, the mother hen.

We became accustomed to the composting toilet and wee-trees, the hot-water bucket showers and the late afternoon campfires. We learned how to

make rope from the inside casing of the hibiscus plant, to shoot a long-bow and walk through the rainforest like a fox . . . unheard.

Our sons filled their afternoons walking and feeding Munchkin, hunting like rangers, climbing trees, playing on the outdoor equipment and entertaining Ada and Cami.

The rain at times felt relentless and the cold seeped into our bones but the gentle and strong presence of our hosts and the beauty of the environment made our outdoor life worthwhile. We depended on the campfire for warmth and connection. We learned to build a successful upside-down fire and managed to light it with only one match! Learning the sacred art of fire-building was heartening and put us in good stead for future camping. The fireside ritual became a daily task: gathering and sorting

the timber, cooking in and around the fire, sharing stories and songs. Gazing at the vast, seemingly endless, star-filled skies filled our hearts with a deep sense of awe and gratitude.

We discovered the vitality of simply spending time together, looking after each other. The simple rhythm of life left us feeling renewed and deeply grateful for spending time in such a breathtakingly beautiful environment.

WWOOF Australia has many families touring Australia, so if you were planning a trip overseas but need to change your plans, or you are looking for something new, why not reach out and try WWOOFing.

- To learn about the myriad wwoofing opportunities in Australia visit: www.wwoof.com.au, or phone the delightful people at the WWOOF office on 0455 023 173.



The simple rhythm of life left the Berrys feeling renewed and grateful.



The Berry family tries wwoofing for the first time.

BEAT THIS

Now is a perfect time to plant silver beet seeds or seedlings. You get such a big bang for your buck that this often-overlooked vegie deserves a little spotlight, says our regular 'fundamental foods' writer, **Wendy Bartlett**, of Normanville in South Australia.

MY FAVOURITE vegetable has to be silverbeet – mainly for its extended growing season, its ability to grow almost anywhere and its versatility in the kitchen. There are few dishes that make it to my dinner table without silverbeet hidden in them somewhere. For a great way to add important 'greens' to your diet, silverbeet is a 'must grow' in the vegie patch.

SOIL PREPARATION

Silverbeet is a hardy biennial vegetable, producing seed in its second year, and isn't fussy where it grows, but prefers a full sun position with a deep, rich soil with high concentrations of nitrogen. I tend to grow it after a green manure crop like broad beans as there is plenty of left over nitrogen available in the soil for healthy leafy growth.

Sow seeds directly in early spring into their garden position about 30 cm



Wendy's silverbeet plant about to take off.

apart and in rows about 50 cm apart, depending on variety. The attractive stems of the Rainbow Chard make it a wonderful ornamental plant in the vegie garden, but plants aren't as vigorous as the giant leaves of the Fordhook variety, so they can be planted closer together.

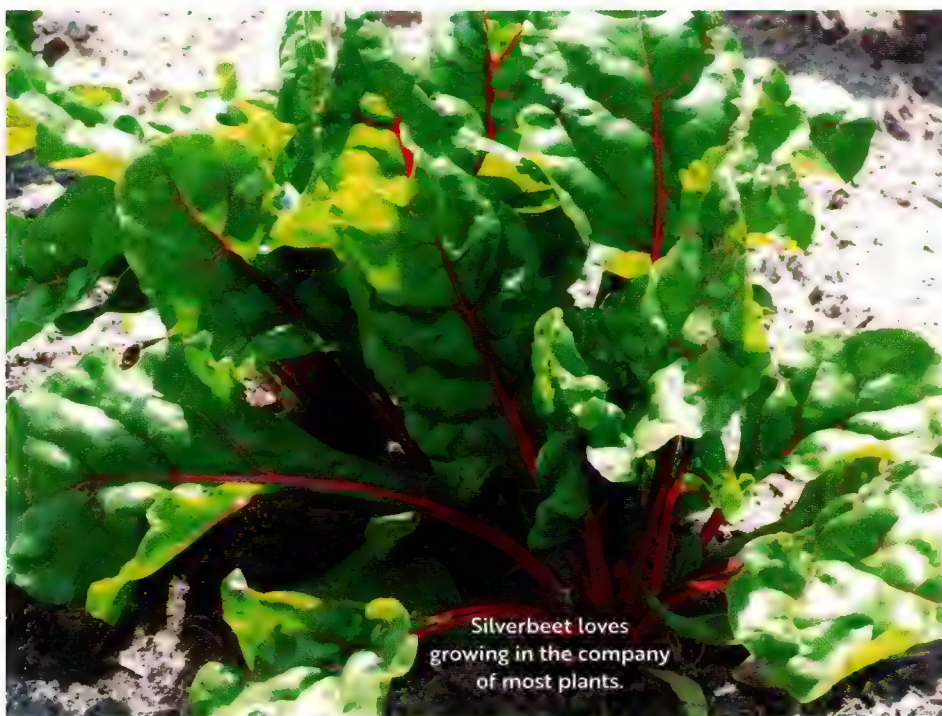
Once the plants are about 10cm tall, they can be thinned to about 40-60cm between plants, planting the thinned seedlings elsewhere in the garden or give them away to friends and family. Seeds can be sown into punnets in early spring

and planted out a month or so later, but forget the hassle of the daily watch of the seedling in punnets and sow direct. They germinate easily as you'll find out if you leave a plant or two to go to seed at the end of the long growing season.

I like to spread well decomposed compost or horse manure over the bed as mulch which doubles as worm food. This is all the feeding that's required. But ensure the soil remains moist because plants can bolt to seed in the first year if they experience periods of dryness.



Older plants can tolerate almost all of their leaves being picked at once.



HARVEST

Pick young leaves often and use them as salad greens, but leave about half the leaves so plants can develop a healthy root system. Older plants can tolerate almost all of their leaves being picked at once, but I always leave two or three to ensure the plant continues to produce foliage.

Silverbeet suffer from few pests and diseases however, slugs and snails can make a meal out of them so place a few beer baits around to solve that potential problem. Or don some boots at night time and go snail collecting.

Silverbeet loves growing in the company of most plants, but particularly

with beetroot, members of the onion family, borage, parsnip and it seems to enjoy all types of lavender, which are peppered throughout my veggie patch.

Saving silverbeet seed is easy and they can stay viable for up to ten years, as long as they are kept in a cool, dry spot. I store my seed in recycled envelopes and place them in a cardboard expanding file in alphabetical order and this lives in my laundry cupboard.

Allow a couple of robust plants to go to seed in their second season and then, on a dry day, run index finger and thumb up the plant and allow the seeds to drop into a container. I tend to pick out any small seeds, keeping only the large, healthy ones.

Silverbeet is wind- as well as insect-pollinated and will cross pollinate with other members of the same family if they are grown nearby. So this is something to remember when deciding to save seed.

FAVOURITE VARIETIES

Fordhook (giant deep green leaves to 60cm tall and crisp white stems) – Digger's seeds.

Digger's Five Colour Mix (Rainbow Chard) – red, yellow, white, pink or bi-colour stems, but not as vigorous as Fordhook, but attractive in garden and on plate.

DID YOU KNOW?

Silverbeet (and members of the same family – beetroot and rhubarb) contain a high oxalic acid content which, in large amounts, can be toxic, so enjoy occasionally but not on a daily basis.

The oxalic acid found in the lamina within silverbeet and beetroot leaves has a higher acid content than that found in rhubarb stems.

behind the scenes

NUMBER FOUR IN A SERIES

JUDITH GRAY

Judith has been the co-publisher and book review editor of *Earth Garden* for 30 years. She lives with her husband Alan and children on a solar-powered 'urban farm' at Cable Beach in Western Australia. Judith is an accomplished artist, art teacher, and yoga and meditation teacher. She is knowledgeable about food gardening, compost and chooks. Judith also runs the *Earth Garden* office, as well as being a Director of the Earth Garden Foundation Ltd, which she helped establish in 2008. Judith has been involved in many other projects and environmental campaigns, and home-schooled three of her children for three years. She was the main cook for a local emergency food charity in Broome, training other cooks for five years. She has travelled extensively throughout the remote deserts of Australia, and trekked in the Himalayas to the most remote Tibetan valleys to install solar lighting in health posts.



ALAN GRAY

Alan has been the editor of *Earth Garden* since 1987. He lives with Judith (co-publisher) and their family on a solar-powered urban farm at Cable Beach in WA. Alan worked as a journalist in Melbourne before taking over *Earth Garden* from Keith and Irene Smith. He has always been an environmental and social activist, pre-dating the Franklin Blockade. Alan is the Chairperson of the Earth Garden Foundation, and has worked for 12 years with their Indigenous partners in the Himalayas to install solar lighting and power in more than 55 remote village health posts and regional hospitals throughout Nepal. Alan and Judith owned Australia's first commercial electric car, the first 'Blade Runner'. He is a keen organic food gardener and surfer, and has travelled extensively through remote desert regions of Australia with his family. Alan has an abiding interest in Aboriginal culture and works on projects to help remote Indigenous families solve their financial crises.

RACHEL ALTENBACHER

Rachel moved onto a rundown property in the rolling hills of the Manning Valley in 2010 and has since established a productive homestead using holistic and permaculture principles. Returning home after months living in a Pacific island village and discovering a passion for growing organic food. Rachel left her corporate career to embark on an adventure of self reliance. She has built vegie patches, an art studio, fences and renovated her mud brick cottage. Rachel presents sustainability talks at community events, co-ordinates a local produce/seed exchange initiative and has implemented kitchen garden programs in numerous early childhood education settings. Her daily practice of mindfulness yoga and making eco-products from scratch contribute towards her contentment in simple, slow living. Dancing continues to be part of her life but rather than competing on the dance floor she choreographs rotational grazing routines for a herd of cattle, sheep, alpacas and poultry with her faithful old horse, Billy Jack, by her side.



TANYA JENKYN

Tanya is a diehard groupie for trees. A well-formed leaf makes her weak at the knees. Call her Chairperson of the Flower Fan Club and Secretary of Seeds. She roots for the tubers and rhizomes of the Earth. Whether there is mushroom or not, she'll fill it with plants. Maybe xylem and phloem courses through her veins because given the chance to speak for them, she'll convince you to help plants proliferate. Coming from a long line of gardeners, Tanya's childhood was spent wandering treelined pathways where she would make cubby houses from foliage and magical potions from flowers. Habits flow down the family tree so it will come as no surprise that Tanya's children also seek to make the world around them grow greener. As a herbalist and horticulturist, she never underestimates the power of plants to heal. Not just with their pharmacological activity and nutritional benefits, but their very existence makes the space around them vibrate with better health.



JULIE HUNT

Julie Hunt has been doing layout for EG for several years. Every three months, long term EG designer and production anchorman, Tony Fuery, sends her a bunch of pictures and stories which she receives with delight. The material is right up her alley. Julie lives on a friend's organic farm near Cygnet, Tasmania, in a mudbrick house she built herself. She keeps chooks, herds possums, and propagates plants for a local landscape architect. Her pièce de résistance is the creation of a commodious composting toilet called The Shatto, complete with chandelier and library. Julie has worked for CSIRO Publishing, producing scientific journals, and for the Tasmanian Department of Education, designing course materials for students. Now her main activity is books – reading them, writing them and occasionally designing them. Her fiction for children has won national awards and her latest novel, *Shoestring, The Boy Who Walks on Air*, features a fortune-telling macaw inspired by the black cockatoos outside her door.

LIZ INGHAM

Liz Ingham has written the *Confessions of a Weekend Hippie* column for *Earth Garden* magazine since 2002. The genesis of the column was that after decades of environment campaigning, she and Trevor had bought 20 acres of beautiful grassy woodland in Central Victoria to save it, and found themselves rewarded with a playground. Without planning it, they found themselves heading there every weekend. The column documents their weekend lives of food gardening, mud building, cooking, preserving, 12-volt wiring (bzzzzt), bush walking, yoga, sewing and all the nanna-technologies, as well as their delight in the seasonal array of native wildflowers, grasses, trees, birds, insects and animals. Liz and Trevor love making and doing, and long evenings of thinking, but like so many Earth Gardeners, this mostly happens on the weekends after their working lives in Melbourne are packed away. Liz's first documented philosophical idea was "that zucchinis have it all worked out", and now you can't stop her.



WENDY BARTLETT

Wendy stumbled across gardening and growing her own food organically in her early 20s. After studying conservation and park management Wendy decided to grow her own food and live a relatively self-sufficient lifestyle as she and her husband raised their two children in a small town in the Adelaide Hills. Wendy spent nearly all her time in the backyard gardening. Wendy won a veggie gardening contest, entered her organic garden in the Open Garden Scheme, and worked for private garden owners in the Hills for 12 years. Next Wendy became a remedial massage therapist, running her own business since 2013. Now she's semi-retired, living by the sea, both children have moved out of home, and she and her husband have just added their new kelpie to their clan. Wendy began writing for *Earth Garden* in 2006 and loves being part of the EG community. She enjoys gardening, hiking, reading, writing fiction and self-sufficiency articles and camping.

Edited by Judith Gray

TURNING DOWN THE NOISE

by Christine Jackman

B&W, 320 pages

Murdoch Books

\$32.99 inc GST

Christine Jackman began her career as a journalist with *The Courier-Mail* in Brisbane in 1993. She has worked in New York as a foreign correspondent, in the Canberra press gallery, and as the social issues writer for *The Australian*. Clearly Christine knows the pressure that a successful career can build in a life. It can be very noisy.

This book is about a quest for a better way of being. *Turning Down the Noise* follows Christine's journey as she explores what is happening to our brains, our lives and our communities as we navigate a never-ending assault on our senses and attention, whether from actual noise, exposure to media or the pings and alerts on our phones.

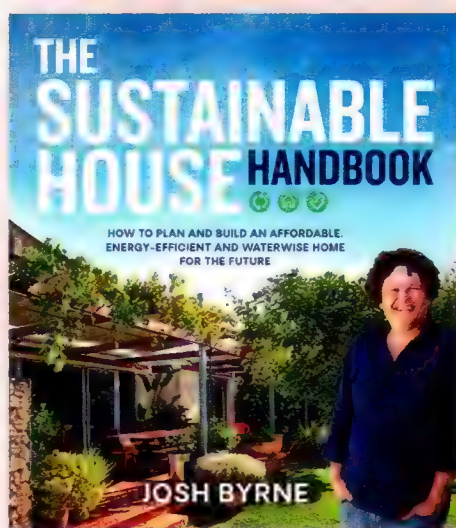
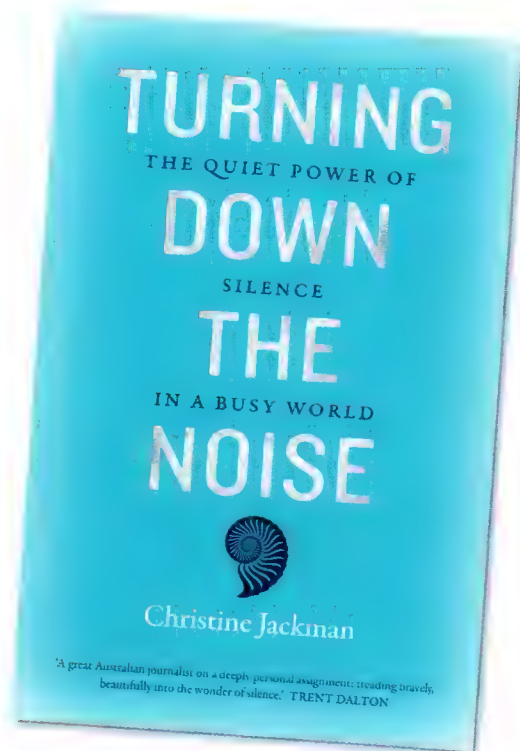
Christine describes the feeling of running out of fuel: "I was jabbing at my own internal accelerator — the one that would lift me to meet any challenge — but nothing was happening."

Christine reveals how we can reverse the damage of agitation

through simple daily acts designed to strip out the stimuli and reclaim the silence. She shares her own experiences and digs into her subject with an inquiring mind and the skills of an investigative journalist.

Consider 'Slices of Silence' such as a meditation practice, tech-free bedtime, a quiet quest (a place near you), walk in Nature, reset between tasks, a media diet or, for the open plan office, library rules. Christine has great suggestions for making good habits work.

This book is a great story as much as a re-think manual. Very thought provoking, and a great guide for improving your lifestyle.



THE SUSTAINABLE HOUSE

Josh Byrne

Paperback 224 pages

Hardie Grant

\$39.99 inc GST

This is a wonderful how to guide, perfect for the home renovator, owner builder or first time builder. Josh brings his vast knowledge of gardening, food growing and sustainability principles together, to demonstrate just what you can achieve with conventional materials.

FIBRE FUELLED

The Plant Based Gut Health Program

by Dr Will Bulsiewicz

B&W 352 pages

Penguin Publishing

\$45.99 inc GST

In this book renowned gastroenterologist Dr Will Bulsiewicz, or Dr B, breaks down the science on gut health, in a relatable and genuine way. He is clearly committed to optimising gut health by using the idea of 'lifestyle medicine'. This book guides the reader through mindful eating to create positive change and healthy outcomes.

It's a step-by-step methodology to stop the misinformation madness caused by the diet industry, and show you the simple, science-backed process for a lifestyle that is effortless, sustainable, and above all else transforms your health by optimising your gut microbiome.

There's no doubt that the key to good health lies in the gut. What studies clearly now show – and what Dr B preaches with his patients – is

Explore how to build an affordable, eco-friendly and energy-plus water-efficient green home for the future. In this book, Josh takes readers through the process of planning a 10-star rated, high-performance home. Build in a cost-effective way to create your perfect living environment.

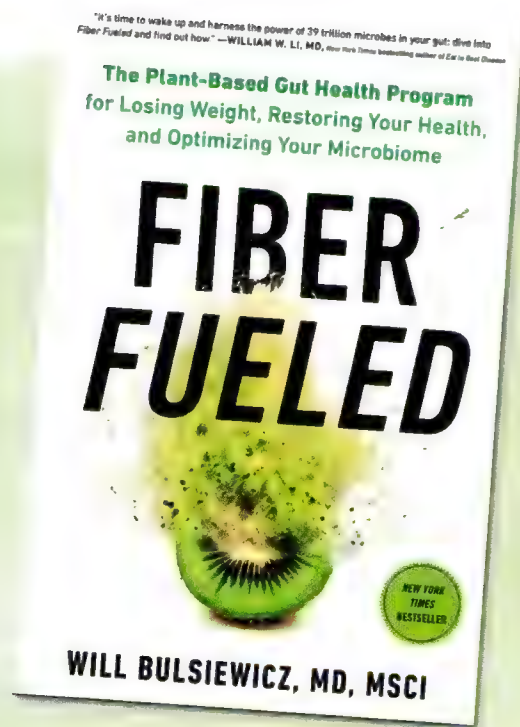
Josh shows how a family home can be comfortable year-round, without the need for air conditioning or additional heating, how to set up a solar power system to cover household needs, and how to reduce water usage by integrating rainwater

that gut health is the key to boosting our metabolism, balancing our hormones, and taming the inflammation that causes a host of diseases.

The scientifically proven way to fuel our gut is with dietary fibre from an abundant variety of colourful plants.

tanks and greywater recycling systems.

This book is jam packed with plans, charts, diagrams and photos to make accessible and bring to life the principles and design potential that are waiting for you. I particularly like the way Josh incorporates food production to add to a highly attractive outdoor space — essential for health and wellbeing. Josh has lots of wonderful, simple ways to make a garden productive and as well as inviting for family use. This book is a great resource.



As Dr B explains, fibre energises our gut microbes to create powerhouse postbiotics called short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) that are essential to our health.

SCFAs are scientifically proven to promote weight loss, repair leaky gut, strengthen the microbiome, optimise the immune system, reduce food sensitivities, lower cholesterol, reverse type 2 diabetes, improve brain function, and even prevent cancer.

Restrictive fad diets starve the gut of the critical fibre we need, weaken the microbes, and make our system vulnerable. As a former junk-food junkie, Dr B knows firsthand the power of fibre to dramatically transform our health.

The good news is that our guts can be trained. Fibre-rich, real foods – with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seeds, nuts, and legumes – start working quickly and maintain your long-term health, promote weight loss, and allow you to thrive and feel great from the inside out. Nothing an Earth Gardener didn't already know?

With a 28-day jumpstart program with menus and more than 65 recipes, along with essential advice on food sensitivities, *Fibre Fueled* offers the blueprint to start lifelong health today.

SOCIAL HOUSING PLAN CUTS ENERGY USE

A new plan from WA's Clean State initiative will see 15,000 energy efficient social housing homes constructed within three years, delivering major benefits for the State. The Building and Housing component of Clean State's Jobs Package aims to create tens of thousands of jobs, reduce homelessness and lower electricity prices for the West Australians moving into those homes.

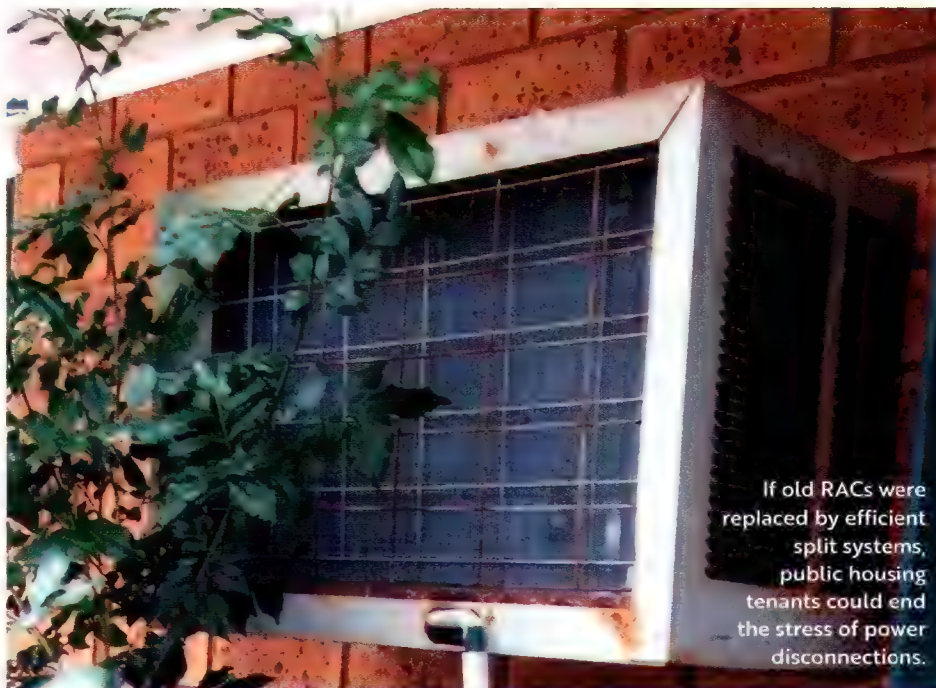
There are 14,000 families on WA's social housing waiting list, waiting an average of 94 weeks for a home — and much longer in areas like the Kimberley — and 1,000 West Australians sleeping rough each night. The plan would deliver homes to those families and individuals with a 7.5 star energy rating, which means lower bills, higher quality of life, and less pollution.

Building these homes in three years would deliver 58,500 shovel and screwdriver-ready full-time construction jobs, 1,150 rooftop solar installation jobs, and 30,000 tonnes in reduced carbon emissions per year.

Recent polling showed 78 per cent of Western Australians support social housing construction and renovation as a stimulus measure in economic recovery plans, with only four per cent against.

Another pillar of the Clean State building plan is the delivery of energy retrofitting to 45,000 social housing homes across the state. A high proportion of public housing tenants are over 65 years old and almost half report a disability and are more likely to be vulnerable to temperature extremes in summer and winter. Simple energy efficiency measures could halve deaths from cold weather, and cut heatwave related deaths by 90 per cent.

Australia's chief scientist, Alan Finkel, recently warned that the country is not doing enough to lift energy efficiency, and said efficiency measures are the 'best form of energy generation you could possibly ever hope to have'. Cutting energy wastage is a huge benefit to householders and to the



If old RACs were replaced by efficient split systems, public housing tenants could end the stress of power disconnections.

environment."

"This plan is a good start but in the Kimberley it needs to be supplemented by a massive retrofit program combining the electricity retailer Horizon Power, the State government, and public housing tenants. The expensive, polluting, dysfunctional RAC aircon units falling out of the walls of public Housing units in the Kimberley should be replaced with super-efficient, inverter-base split systems that can use 75% less electricity. This would end the horrendous stress caused by power disconnections for people — mainly Aboriginal — who simply can't afford huge power bills. It's a win-win because Horizon Power would have much lower network costs going into peak times," said Kimberley resident and *Earth Garden* editor, Alan Gray.

BUSHFIRE ENERGY SECURITY IS ON OUR ROOFTOPS

Think back to last summer during the worst of the bushfire days: whole communities blacked out, shopping centres like an apocalypse movie set, and many more scheduled black outs on the horizon. Entire States were urged to

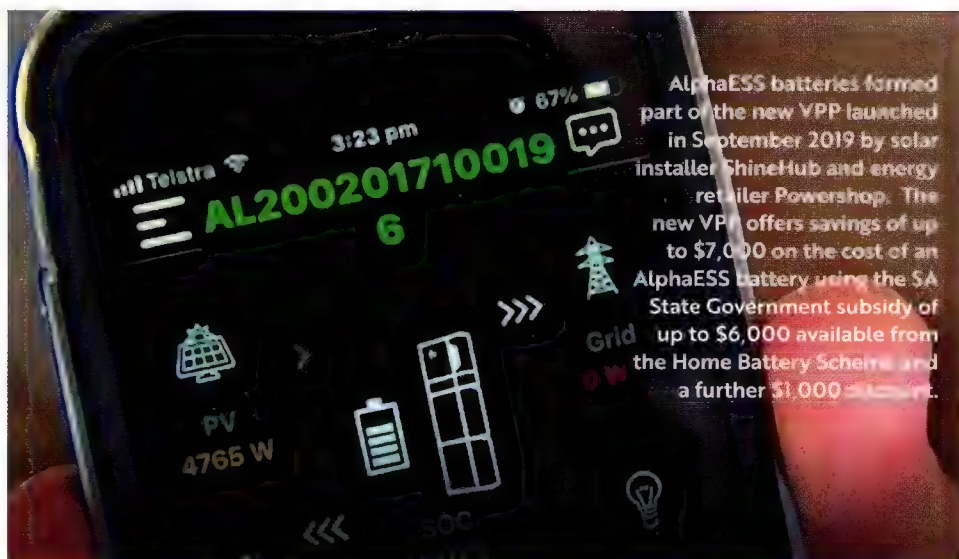
actively reduce their energy usage, asking us to forgo our air conditioners and fans in the middle of a heatwave.

If you were miles away from the nearest fire and wondered how cutting your energy usage could possibly have helped, the answer is simple: the fires forced closure of Australia's 'energy highways' which put us at real risk of running out.

Australia's ageing energy network is highly centralised. Power is generated at a few main points and distributed via huge power lines that run through the bush and into our cities. Our States are connected via a main 'power highway', providing the option for States to share power when needed. During the bushfire crisis, our interstate power highway was closed.

Powerlines are shut down to stop them igniting and spreading fires. New fires can also start when trees brush up against live lines. When the main line from a centralised source is shut down, countless communities are affected. This is nothing but a Band-Aid solution to a much wider problem. The decentralisation of Australia's energy network is urgently needed and the solution lies on our rooftops.

Household solar and battery



technology is rapidly on the rise. For individual households, there is of course great security knowing that you can be largely energy self-sufficient during times of crisis and blackouts. But, beyond that, solar batteries are the quickest, easiest and most cost-effective means in which Australia can decentralise its energy network.

Solar batteries are basically a reserve of renewable energy that can be deployed at any time. When power is shared within local communities it doesn't need to travel through the big energy highways, but rather through the local network called the 'low voltage network'. If main lines are cut during times of crisis, the lights stay on in local communities. Radios can share emergency information, food can remain cold and phones can be charged.

A network of household batteries is called a 'Virtual Power Plant' (VPP). VPPs tap into existing infrastructure and connect household batteries via The Cloud. For households fitted with solar and battery technology connecting to a VPP can be as simple as downloading an app and roping in cash each time their battery is used. This is a total win-win way to solve Australia's centralised energy crisis.

The good news is, VPPs are starting to pop up all over Australia with a few key players in the energy space taking the lead. But, in order to fast-track the mass adoption of VPP technology, government support is vital. South Australia is a perfect example. Having thrown its weight behind a number of different VPPs, South Australia is the only State in Australia that

is rapidly decentralising its energy network. ShineHub's VPP in South Australia alone is made up of over 1,000 households, the equivalent of two gas power plants.

Australia's centralised energy network has been ticking time bomb long before the fires brought it to light. It shouldn't take a national crisis for us to finally see what was already broken, but now that it has, we have a duty to fix it. VPPs are a solution we can take into our own hands – as businesses, as individuals and hopefully with the support of government. It's time to rip the Band-Aid off and turn the lights back on.

—Alex Georgiou is the CEO of ShineHub.

CANBERRA HOUSEHOLDS REJECT GAS

The ACT has taken another step towards zero net emissions by lifting the mandatory requirement that mains gas infrastructure is rolled out to new

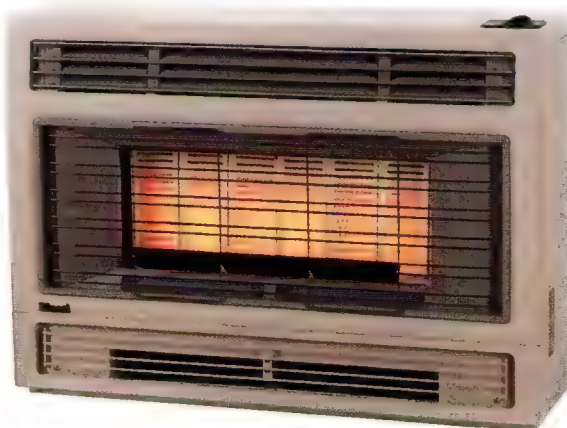
housing developments. There has been a long standing requirement under ACT planning laws that all Canberra households must be connected to the mains gas supply, a requirement that saw costly gas infrastructure installed in new suburbs despite rising gas prices and a growing recognition of the need to shift away from fossil fuels.

Under a draft amendment to the ACT Territory Plan, this requirement would be removed allowing the development of electric-only suburbs, making it easier to support households eliminate their emissions footprint.

ACT climate minister, Shane Rattenbury, flagged the ACT Government's intention of phasing out gas use altogether in the Territory when he unveiled the ACT Government's climate change strategy to 2025 in September last year. The ACT government has already observed a fall in gas usage across Canberra households, following surging gas prices that have raised costs for households across eastern Australia.

Since 2010, average annual household gas consumption by Canberra households has dropped by 22 per cent, with the proportion of households using gas to heat their homes falling from 60 per cent in 2011 to just 45 per cent in 2014.

The ACT has committed to reaching zero net emissions by 2040, and last year became the first State or Territory to shift from an electricity supply predominantly fuelled by coal and gas to one supplied by 100 per cent renewable electricity.



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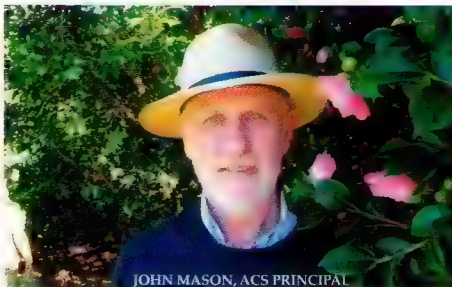
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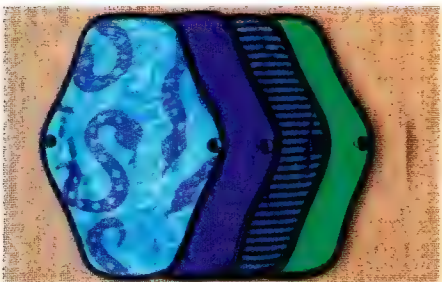
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EGFA's 59th project is the solar electrification of the Gakhu village health centre in the Gorkha District of Nepal. After successful fundraising, EGFA transferred the funds for the project (AUD\$5,500) in April 2020 to our Indigenous Nepali partner organisation, the Himalayan Light Foundation, to manage the project. The project will see 400 watt solar panels, 200Ah/hr batteries, a 900Va inverter plus charge controller and seven LED lights installed in the rooms of the health centre for lighting and to run medical equipment.

But once again, we are unable to bring good news of a successful completion of the project because of the coronavirus lockdown in Nepal. At one stage, our intrepid manager Yadav Gurung, advised that he was able to submit our project paperwork for approval to the Nepali Government. But then things ground to a halt again, and we are waiting, waiting, waiting. Life is very difficult for people in Nepal these days, and EGFA is determined to support our wonderful HLF manager, Yadav, until the situation improves and life can return to a new normal.

— Alan Gray, Chairperson, EGFA Limited.

\$66 per year sees every cent delivered to needy Himalayan communities to install solar lighting plants in health posts & schools.

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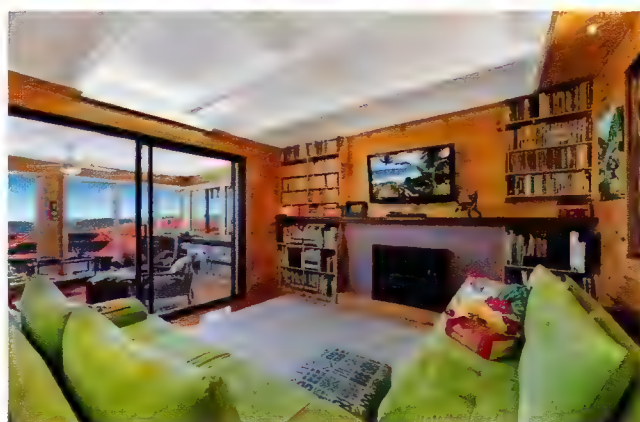
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LOWER BEECHMONT — Time for tree change? Lower Beechmont is a small rural community 12 minutes to Nerang, views to Gold Coast and western ranges, overlooking Heinze Dam. Dual living; bring the parents, give teenagers a space, run a home business. Enjoy fruit from your orchard, collect fresh eggs and grown your own vegies. Unique 5 bedroom, 3 bath, brick and timber, two-storey home; insulated, gas cooking and heating, solar power on grid, solar hot water, 892 square metre block, 2 x 22,000 litre water tanks, fully fenced, powered shed; general store, café, bus to schools. \$649,000. Contact Janis on 0407 834 559. 📍📷📷📷

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LAND Lines

NSW



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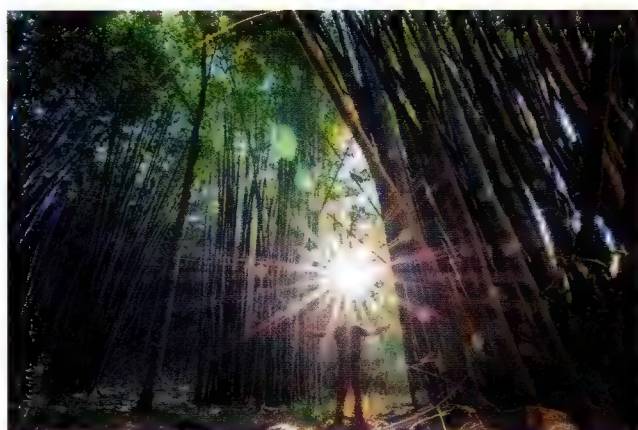
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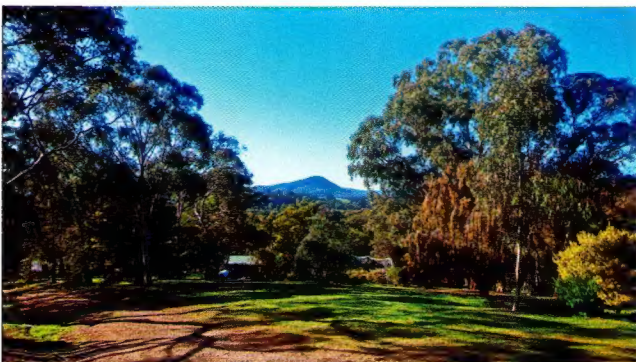
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